

## Minutes of the Stoneleigh History Society meeting on Tuesday 27.9.22

1. There were 11 apologies
2. There were 20 members, and 9 visitors present.
3. Sheila welcomed the speaker, Tony Merrygold, and all those present. She gave out several notices: a. Warwick Words History Festival is due to take place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> of October. One of our members Celia Baly has a part in one of the events! b. The SHS programme is now complete for 2023. Note that there is an extra meeting in June rather than an outing. c. There is a Heritage Conference in Coventry in October and Pete James will represent SHS. d. Sheila offered her thanks to those who had helped in the Church during the September Heritage weekend. e. Congratulations to Lisa Reay and Jill Kashi on their successful Westwood Heath display. f. The Gibbet Hill Farm petition was well supported by members and others in the area and in Australia. Jill Kashi expects to hear from Historic England this week (see postscript). e. g. Several members visited Middleton Hall with the Warwickshire Local History Society in the summer. Baddesley Clinton Manor House has been chosen by the same for their Christmas outing. h. Thanks to Sarah for agreeing to organise the refreshment rota and to Ruth and Maggie for volunteering to prepare them this evening. i. Finally, Sheila invited members to think about volunteering to undertake other supporting roles e.g., acting as host for the evening\*, putting out/ replacing the chairs, organising a trip for members etc.
4. Tony Merrygold began his presentation on '*The Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust*'.  
Tony is the Vehicle Collection Manager and has been in the role for 6 years after a 20-year career in Sales and Marketing with IBM. The Trust is based at Gaydon and has 170 vehicles in its collection. Some of the collection is on display at Gaydon, some at Coventry Transport Museum and others at venues across the country and abroad. The charity relies heavily on volunteers, but the vehicles are maintained by 10 technicians employed by JLR.  
Tony then gave a short history of the origins and development of the Jaguar car company founded by *William Lyons*.  
William Lyons came from Blackpool and from a young age had an eye for design, plus great business acumen. His love of motor bikes led him to start an apprenticeship with Crossley Motors in Manchester. When this didn't work out, he found himself back in Blackpool eventually working in partnership with *William Walmsley* to make side cars for motorcycles. In 1922 aged 21 he formed a partnership with Walmsley.  
In 1927 the company began designing car bodies and went into business with an Austin car dealership to fit car bodies on to an Austin Seven chassis. The car was called the *Austin Seven Swallow*. On the success of this venture the company moved to a factory where they produced both cars and side cars.  
Having a talent for promoting his products, Lyons travelled to Birmingham with his Austin Seven Swallow. He gained an order for 27 cars from car dealership, *P.J. Evans* and in 1928 an order for 20 cars a week from *Henley's*, of Gt. Portland Street in London.  
The premises in Blackpool were insufficiently large to produce these numbers so Lyons travelled to Coventry which was the centre of car production at the time. After skilful negotiation he secured sites in Holbrooks and the Foleshill Road and in 1928 he began car production in Coventry. Thirty of the fifty employees he had had in Blackpool moved with him and formed the nucleus of his workforce. In July 1931 the Swallow became *SS Cars*. In 1933 William Walmsley retired from the business and Lyons was in sole control. In 1937 Lyons moved his family home from Woodside, Gibbet Hill to Wappenbury Hall in Warwickshire.  
During the Second World War the company was heavily involved in vehicle building for the Ministry of Defence. They produced side cars, assembled planes and did aircraft repairs.

The company's employees gained many skills and knowledge which was to benefit them when hostilities came to an end.

In 1945 the company changed its name to *Jaguar Cars* and in 1950 opened a new factory at Browns Lane in Allesley. Due to the success of the *XK120* model the company had a profitable decade and expanded once more, this time to the Daimler site at Radford. In 1956 William Lyons was knighted for services to the motor industry.

From 1960 engine production was based at Radford and car assembly at Browns Lane. The business continued to do well particularly with the launch of the *Jaguar E Type* at the Geneva Motor Show in 1961. Later, in order to protect the supply of car bodies to Jaguar, Lyons merged Jaguar Daimler with the *British Motor Corporation* which produced Austin and Morris motors.

However, in 1968 a period of decline in Jaguar's fortune began after the formation of British Leyland. Eventually, although Jaguar was profitable as a part of British Leyland it ended up supporting the less profitable but much larger part of the group.

What followed was a period of instability and takeover, firstly by Ford and then by Tata.

Sir William Lyons, retired from active involvement in the company in 1972 but retained an interest from the comfort of his home at Wappenbury Hall. He died in 1985.

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There were questions following Tony's presentation. These continued over coffee and biscuits.

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm

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PS RE para. 3f above, Sheila reports that following the news that Historic England are refusing to grant listed status to Gibbet Hill Farm (on the grounds that it has little architectural merit of itself - and apparently undervaluing the legacy of Sir Henry Parkes), I have received a call from the University to say that they have "no intention whatsoever" to demolish the building. Jill has asked me to take any further action forward, so I am writing to Historic England to appeal the decision. The Coventry Society is keen to take the same action.

I have also suggested to the University that, as they don't seem interested in a blue plaque, at the very least the building is renamed the Sir Henry Parkes Building. If they were to agree to this it might engender some publicity which in turn might give them pause for thought about any future plans. I might be living in cloud cuckoo-land but I don't intend to give up yet!

A letter of appeal has also gone to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

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Re para. 4g, Adrian Clarke has kindly offered to help with hosting

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**Sue Crofts**

(SUE - *Many thanks for taking the minutes on my behalf as I had just had an eye injection and couldn't see well enough to perform my usual duties.* Margaret Wallis, Hon. Sec. SHS)

