

NOTES OF SHS MEETING HELD ON 31 JANUARY 2023

Present: 26 SHS members, 2 new members and 3 visitors

Apologies: Sue Line, Margaret Brown, Phil and Kathryn Jones

Introduction: Sheila Woolf welcomed people to the meeting. Notices were as follows:

1. Thanks to those came to her talk on Philip Larkin in a very cold church on 2 December.
2. The 1921 census has now been published. This contains a great deal of information about how things changed since 1911, including where people worked. Earlsdon History Research Group has generously offered shared membership which would mean that one nominated member of SHS could access the site. Anyone interested in taking on this role was asked to contact Sheila.
3. Grants (c£250) from Warwick District Council were available for activities associated with the King's Coronation in May. The Village Club was considering events but were feeling rather 'punch drunk' with the various events that had been organised in the recent past. The Parish Council was considering mugs for children. Negotiations were ongoing among the bodies most directly concerned with organisation. SHS might consider adding to our current Platinum Jubilee Display with the display created by Pam Baker in 2011 called Coronation Christenings, denoting all those christened in Stoneleigh during coronation years gone by.
4. Warwickshire Local History Society had sent preliminary meeting/visit dates for the forthcoming year. SHS was an associate member so members could attend if they wished. Sheila said she would circulate the list after the meeting.
5. Rob Orland had very kindly agreed to rebuild and take over the running of the SHS website. Sheila thanked him profusely. His expertise had already been invaluable.

Sue Crofts, SHS Treasurer, thanked members for renewing their subscriptions so promptly. Very few were outstanding.

Sheila then introduced Peter James to speak about ‘The Grand Complication’

This mystery involved a watch which was commissioned by the American railway magnate, J.P. Morgan, from Coventry watchmaker, Joseph Player, in 1905 and took 5 years to make. It was a two-sided gold pocket watch and weighed 1.75 lbs. This watch contained an annual calendar, sun set and rise, moon set and rise etc. and a tourbillon.

J.P. Morgan had a ticket for the ‘Titanic’ but illness saved him from death in that disaster, but he died a year later in Rome. He had an extensive watch collection, mainly C16-19, and 250 of this were donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

By 1947 the watch belonged to Benjamin Mellenhoff, chief watchmaker at Tiffany & Co. in New York. Subsequent owners included Jan Skala, a jewellery maker and watch collector, who never said how he obtained the watch but he sold it to Sam Bloomfield, Chief Engineer at Swallow Airplanes. Tracking down subsequent ownership became an obsession of Daniel Miller of the *Los Angeles Times*. Names discovered included Archduke of Austria, (Gezo von Hapsburg, Chair of Operations at Christie’s in Switzerland), Osvaldo Rolex, possibly the Sultan of Oman. In 1983 Bobinet, founder of Andrew Crisford, bought the watch for \$250,000, but sold it the same year refusing to name the buyer although he assured Daniel Miller that it was still with the same person and that he had seen it recently.. Apparently a grandson of Joseph Player was very pleased that the watch had been traced even if the current owner was unknown.

How much might the Morgan watch be worth now? A clue might be that in November 2013 a Patrick Philippe watch was sold for £19,000,000. The Morgan watch is a huge tribute to British (Coventry) watchmakers and remains the most complicated ever made in the UK.

Sheila thanked Pete for a most interesting talk and invited members to enjoy refreshments before hearing four SHS members talk about their current researches– Mel Dearing on her plans for an architectural reconstruction of Stoneleigh Abbey, Jill Kashi on her research into the local Girls’ Reformatory, Maggie Moorhouse on her volunteer work for the Historic Coventry Trust, researching Lizzie Stewart, and Peter James on local man Edward Cave who founded the Gentleman’s Magazine.

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