STONELEIGH HISTORY SOCIETY

Minutes of the meeting held on the 27th of June 2023 in Stoneleigh Village Hall.

1. Sheila welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were 25 members present and 9 visitors.
2. Apologies were received from: Pam Baker, Celia Baly, Clare and Adrian Clarke, John Purcell, jean Vaughan, Sue Line, Maggie Moorhouse and Ian Harrop.
3. Announcements: Sheila reminded everyone that volunteers were still needed for the refreshment rota; parking arrangements for the book launch on the 28th of June at Ashow should meet everyone's needs; finally, our next meeting will be on the 26th of September. The talk will be 'Pantomimes – Oh Yes we Do!' by Sarah Boden.
4. Sheila introduced our speaker for the evening – Niamh Carton, Community Engagement Manager at St. Mary's Guildhall, Coventry.
   Niamh told us a little of her background as a Medieval Archaeologist and began her talk on the restoration project.

   This is a summary of the main points:

St. Mary's Guildhall, Coventry

'From 2019 – 2022 St Mary's Guildhall underwent a £6.2 renovation funded by a number of public bodies including the Arts Council and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.
Areas previously not available to view, such as the Medieval Kitchen and the Muniment Room are now open.
The Guildhall was built in the 1340's and is one of the finest examples in the country. It was the base for the merchant guild of St. Mary and later for the united guilds of the Holy Trinity, St. Mary, St. John the Baptist and St. Katherine. When chantries and religious guilds were suppressed by Edward V1 in 1547 it became the city's armoury, then treasury and up to 1920 the centre of administration for the city council.

The Medieval Kitchen. The renovation has allowed us to find out about the ways in which the guildhall was used. In the 1940s a modern kitchen was installed which meant that the medieval kitchen was protected. Now that this has been removed the stone arches, the oldest parts of the building, can more clearly be seen.
In addition, the old stone floor was lifted, and remains of animal bones were found. These bones were the remains of cattle which showed that high status guests ate there. The excavation also found evidence which suggested that during the 'depression of the 1860s' the kitchen was used to feed textile workers in need.

The Coventry Tapestry. The tapestry is the oldest, in its original setting, in Britain. It was made, probably in Tournai, between 1505 and 1515 and installed in the Great Hall in honour of Henry V1. It has two levels, the upper one shows religious figures while the lower one depicts royalty. The stained-glass window above the tapestry has columns which line up with those in the tapestry.

The tapestry tells a story as the great majority of people could not read. The visual images were very important, but there is evidence that over time these images were altered in order to convey a new message. Differences in stitching quality seem to suggest this and an analysis of fibres is being undertaken in Belgium to find out more. The tapestry is now protected by a temperature-controlled covering.

The Stained glass window. The glass is believed to be the work of John Thornton who also did work in St. Michael's Cathedral and in York Minster. His work appears to have a 'signature style' in the way noses are portrayed on some of the human figures!
He had a workshop in the Burges.

Hidden gems! Graffiti is visible in a number of places, notably on the glass and on the stonework. Witch marks can be detected on the stone arches.

Going Forward – A varied programme of talks and events are planned to encourage visitors from home and abroad.'

There were a number of questions following the presentation and Sheila proposed a follow up visit to the Guildhall in the autumn.

N.B. Sheila would like to thank all SHS members who helped out at her book launch on Wednesday. Their assistance, whether attending the event, fetching and carrying or dispensing fizz is much appreciated.

S M Crofts Honorary Secretary 28.6.30