

## **Stoneleigh History Society**

### **Minutes of the meeting held on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 2024.**

1. Sheila welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were 11 apologies, 20 members present and 1 visitor.
2. There were a number of announcements – Sheila had not received many responses to her email about paper copies of the SA News. If you do wish to receive one, please get in touch. She then read an extract from a 1989 copy of the same. It was amazing to hear how times have changed. Sheila gave a list of events and dates; these can be found on the attachment to these minutes.
3. Sheila introduced the Speaker – Kevin Hunt.

### **‘William Gascoyne – ‘The ambitious stonemason’**

William was born in Stoney Stratford in 1827 and after the early death of his father he became an apprentice stonemason. After his marriage to Martha the pair moved to Lillington and by 1848, he had established himself as a local builder. In 1851 he was living in a modest cottage at 22, Rugby Road, Lillington but by 1855 he had bought land and built a house and workshops in Willes Road, Leamington.

His first commission was the Corn Exchange in Warwick but soon other projects followed: The Bedford Hotel conversion, Rugby Town Hall, Newbold Beeches, ‘Beauchamp Hall’, St Peter’s RC Church in Dormer Place, ‘Thorn Bank’ at Milverton and ‘Harrington House’ in Newbold Terrace. The latter was a Gothic style villa supposedly designed by AW Pugin. It cost £20,000 and had 13 bedrooms, one bathroom and 7 bedrooms for servants.

He also built more modest housing in Leamington in the form of terraces in Villiers Street, Trinity Street and Binswood Avenue.

In 1867 he expanded the business and opened an office in Beckenham, Kent and later built shops and houses close to the railway station.

William combined his business interests with those of a more civic nature. In 1861 he was elected to the local Board of Health and later a number of other local government committees.

He became a Mason and churchwarden and stood for election as a local councillor. In 1875 he became an alderman.

Like many ambitious businessmen he ventured into agriculture and bought two farms in Lillington – Village and Manor Farm. At one time he was described as ‘Builder, contractor and Farmer of 286 acres employing 7 men and 6 boys’. He supplied local businesses with the produce of his farms.

Business appeared to be booming but in January 1885 William was declared

bankrupt in the Surrey Courts. The main reason was that his son James had incurred heavy losses and had not maintained good financial records. As a result, James left the family business and emigrated to Australia. William and Martha relocated to Kent where they ended their days.

A building project planned by William was overseen by a Trustee appointed by the court. The project was to build a Citadel for the Salvation Army in Park Street, Leamington. It was a massive building accommodating 2,000 people but despite being well funded there were delays and concern that the building would not be completed in time for its opening in 1885.

This was the last of William Gascoyne's building projects and although William jnr. built a row of terraced houses in Leamington in 1889, this was the end of what had been a very successful period for the Gascoyne's.

In August 1889 Martha died and was buried in Lillington, while William lived a further 3 Years and died in October 1902 he was buried in a Beckenham cemetery.

William Gascoyne contributed much to the development of Leamington Spa in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He took an active part in public life and made his mark in a number of ways. In order to recognise his contribution a blue plaque was placed on the wall of his former home, Number 2, Willes Road, in 2019.

However, it's sad to list the number of buildings associated with him that are no longer in existence e.g.

Harrington House – demolished to make way for the Spa Centre in 1967

Salvation Army Citadel – demolished to make way for the Royal Priors car park.

N.B. An exhibition entitled 'Lost Leamington' is currently on display at the Leamington Museum and Library.

4. Sheila thanked Kevin for his presentation. After questions the meeting ended and coffee and biscuits were served.
5. The next meeting will be on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February when Sheila will be giving a presentation entitled 'Who's ever heard of Hamstall?'.

