

Stoneleigh History Society

Minutes of the meeting held on the 30th of April at Stoneleigh Village Hall, 7.30 pm.

1. Sheila welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. Apologies were received from: Celia Baly, Pam Baker, Clare and Adrian Clarke, Rob Orland, Pete James, Margaret Davies and Liz Sykes. There were 24 members present and 2 visitors.
3. Notices: On the screen Lisa had put a rolling video of a 1980s 'WI diary of Village Life'. The diary was available for members to look at during the interval. Sheila encouraged members to visit the Leigh Chapel where other interesting archives could be accessed. Sheila had noted a visitor comment from a woman who had run the mobile library in the 1960s. She was complimentary about the interesting items available.

Sheila gave an update on the blue plaque to be eventually placed on the forge wall. In addition a scale model of the forge has been donated to the SHS and will be on display in the Leigh Chapel.

Sheila also reminded members of the outings organised by WLHS – one in June to Mancetter and another one in May to Rugby. Further details on their website.

Sue Crofts outlined plans for the Christmas Social 2024. She and Sarah Ballinger will be organising a Christmas Quiz and urged members to submit one question each, relating to the area in which they live. They should attach 3 possible answers to the question. Sarah and Sue will put together a question sheet from the submissions and act as 'Quiz Organisers' on the night.

All attending will be randomly placed in groups of 3 or 4 to make a quiz team. There will be a prize for the winning team. The idea is basically to have some fun and test our local knowledge. Sue gave an example of a suitable question with 3 possible answers – 'Where in the 1960s would you find the zoo in Coventry? Answers – Bull Yard, Hillfields, Whitley. Over 50% of members knew that Whitley was the correct answer!

Questions and answers should be submitted online to Sarah and Sue or brought 'in a sealed envelope' to the May meeting.

4. **Vanessa Morgan** gave her presentation on 'Coventry murders in the 1800s' Vanessa outlined details of a number of murders that had taken place in Coventry and Warwickshire during the 19th century. Most of the culprits were found guilty and hanged or transported to Australia.

Thomas Payne – found guilty of the murder of his sister-in-law, Charlotte. He cut her throat blaming his wife's behaviour as the cause. He was hanged at Warwick Gaol in 1888.

Ann Heytrey - found guilty of the murder of her employer Sarah Dormer at Dial House Farm, Ashow in 1819. Ann had attacked Sarah, dragged her upstairs and cut her throat. She tried to make out that Sarah had cut her own throat. Ann was found guilty and hanged.

Thomas Heytrey, Ann's brother – found guilty of the murder of William Hiron. Along with 3 others he had robbed and physically assaulted William, leaving him to die. In April 1821 he was found guilty at Warwick Assizes and ordered to be hanged and dissected.

Mary Ann Higgins – found guilty of the murder of her uncle, William Higgins. Mary Ann had poisoned her uncle by placing arsenic in his evening meal of pea soup. She

was hanged on Whitley Common in August 1831 before an audience of 15,000 people. An interesting addition is that in 1972 Mary's skull was donated to the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum. At the time of her dissection the police surgeon had kept her skull.

Mary Ford – was found guilty of poisoning her husband, Thomas, by putting arsenic in his gruel. She was hung in August 1849.

James Reed – was found guilty of murdering Thomas Tranter of Berkswell. James had robbed and murdered Thomas with a bill hook. After disappearing and using several aliases James was arrested, tried and found guilty. He was sent to Tasmania aboard a convict ship in 1851.

During a Q&A session Vanessa explained that dissection was a punishment added to the most serious crimes. In the Christian tradition it meant that the dead would not be able to enter heaven. N.B. Dissection was abolished in 1832 and public hangings on Whitley Common ceased at the end of 1831.

5. Sheila thanked the Speaker and refreshments were served.
6. The next meeting will be held on the **21st of May**. The Speaker will be Tim Clark on 'The building of St. Mary's in 6 people'. Please note the earlier date.