

Stoneleigh History Society

Minutes of the meeting held on June the 25th at 7.30 pm, Stoneleigh Village Hall.

1. Sheila welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were 19 members present, 3 visitors and 14 apologies.
2. Notices: a. Five years have elapsed since the 'Roseblade' watercolours were donated to the society. Anthony Bianco who won the auction to buy one of the paintings, has bequeathed it to the society. Anyone interested in purchasing the watercolour, which has been framed and mounted, should contact Sheila. b. The Fardon blue plaque will be installed at the forge in September. c. The society would formally like to send good wishes to Pam Baker following the death of her husband Mike. A number of society members attended the very moving funeral service which was held in St. Mary's Church. d. Members who would like to give a short presentation on their research in February next year should contact Sheila so that she can draw up the 2025 programme. e. Thanks to Lisa and Jane for providing the refreshments.
3. Sheila introduced the speaker Margaret Rushton and invited her to give her presentation.

'5 Formidable local females'

Margaret explained that they were formidable in terms of what they achieved in life considering the social attitudes to women at the time.

Alice Rosa Barker
1843 – 1887

Alice's father was an ironmaster from Wolverhampton. The family lived at Albrighton Hall on the outskirts of the town but later moved to Chorlton House in Binswood Avenue, Leamington Spa.

Alice liked to ride and hunt and later developed a taste for foreign travel. She and her brother travelled around Europe. They went climbing in the Dolomites and in 1873 travelled to Egypt.

At the age of 44 Alice decided to go mountain climbing in Switzerland. Unfortunately after an ascent of over 3,000 feet she suffered from the cold and died later.

She was buried in the family vault in Wolverhampton.

Catherine Cutter
1863 – 1946

Catherine became Head of Lillington School aged 21 and remained there for 40 years. The curriculum was based on the three Rs, singing, knitting and military drill. The annual inspection was strict and determined whether the school would be adequately funded the following year. The comments made by the inspectors were displayed on the wall for all to see.

By 1891 there were 90 children attending from the age of 3 to 13. An extension was added and the school in the evening was used as a reading room for working men. As the school grew a pupil teacher joined Catherine and in 1897 another extension was added to the building.

Catherine was highly regarded in the community and after serving 25 years a collection raised £250. When she finally retired in 1924, she received an engraved ring and a sewing machine.

During her career she experienced many changes in education and in society.

Rosemary A.F. Thwaites
1916 – 1987

Rosemary's father was an engineer, and she developed a love of driving. She had learnt to drive a car at a young age and her ambition was to be a rally driver. This was not to be and instead she became known as the 'road convoy queen'.

During WW2 she taught ARP staff to drive but her most daring work was involved in driving to ports where she collected parts for diggers and excavators, shipped from the US, which she brought back to the Midlands. These were assembled and used to create airfields from farmland.

After the war she devoted her time to the WRVS and the scouting movement.

Rosa Harriet Newmarch
1857 – 1940

Rosa came from a well-off family. Their home was a large Georgian house at the top of the Parade in Leamington.

Rosa became a journalist and author. When her parents died, she moved to Kensington with a relative but later returned to Leamington.

She married but her husband was not financially astute, and Rosa had to keep things 'afloat'. She learnt to speak Russian and visited a number of times. She was a musician and was keen to promote Russian composers. She wrote a number of books, one about Henry Wood, of Promenade Concert fame.

Her husband was not only bad with money, but he was also a philanderer. He died after going missing on Exmoor!

Rosa's achievements are recognised by the blue plaque which was erected at her former home in Clarendon Avenue.

Mrs M. M .M. Fowler OBE
1881 – 1957

In WW1 Mrs Fowler, as she was always known, was Commandant of the VAD hospital in Nuneaton.

She was an avid caravaner and introduced blue first aid caravans which were positioned at busy road junctions. She was a big fund raiser for the Red Cross and gave performances with Morgan, her driver. Sometimes her dogs performed as well.

She owned the 'Blue Café' in Leamington where there were dances and other performances. She provided lodgings for actors and other performers at her family home in Newbold Terrace.

On the site of the former 'Blue Café' there is a blue plaque in memory of her and her achievements.

Margaret was very pleased that her work to increase the number of blue plaques relating to women's achievements is beginning to bear fruit.

4. Sheila thanked Margaret for a very interesting presentation and invited questions from the audience.
5. After refreshments the meeting concluded at 21.00
6. Our next meeting is on the 24th of September.

SMC 27.06.24