

## Stoneleigh History Society

### Minutes of the meeting held on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 2025 at Stoneleigh Village Hall 7.30 pm.

1. Sheila welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were 18 members present and one visitor. Apologies were received from Celia Baly, Mel Bianco, Maggie Moorhouse, Kate Jones, Liz Sykes, Nora Blagburn, Pam Baker, Shirley Ball, Jill Kashi, Ruth and Bruce Oliver.
2. Notices: Phil Jones had tickets to sell for the Summer Serenade which will be held on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July in the walled garden at Stoneleigh Abbey.
3. Sheila welcomed Quentin, our speaker for the evening and pointed out that this was another of the member presentations being delivered in 2025.
4. **'From Smyrna to Stoneleigh: my Levantine Heritage.'**

Quentin explained that he had taken on the role of family genealogist from his mother. One half of his family has a history of living in the Ottoman Empire and being Levantines.

The purpose of his presentation was to explain the extent of the Ottoman Empire, the reason why people from many European countries settled there and what eventually happened.

The Ottoman Empire lasted for about 600 years, dominating the eastern Mediterranean and stretching from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean, to the Persian Gulf, East to the Caspian Sea, North to Ukraine and West to Hungary. The term 'Levantine' refers to someone, usually European, who settled in the eastern Mediterranean area of what is now Turkey/ Syria/ Lebanon. Smyrna is now known as Izmir.

Throughout its' 600 year history the Ottoman Empire was a military and trading power. It had good trading relations with Venice, France, the Dutch Republic, Sweden and Britain. At the same time it had military rivals in Russia and the Holy Roman Empire but also allies in the Polish - Lithuanian Commonwealth. It had trading agreements, or capitulations, with Christian nations which allowed their citizens to live in the Ottoman Empire and enjoy exemptions and privileges which made trade very attractive and lucrative. Access to the Silk Road meant that many commodities and certain manufactured goods like silks and carpets were accessible.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the Empire came under pressure from European countries and economically and militarily it was weakened. It underwent a period of modernisation which paved the way for the modern state of Turkey but by the end of the century the breakup of the Empire was inevitable. After the Russo - Ottoman War of 1877-78, which Russia won, they had to grant

independence to Romania, Serbia and Montenegro and autonomy to Bulgaria. They also had to cede part of Armenia to Russia. The aftermath of the First World War brought about great changes in the region. The Treaty of Lausanne ended the conflict between Turkey and the European powers, and the current borders of Turkey were established. All Capitulations, trading agreements, were abolished.

In 1919 the Greeks invaded Anatolia, but things continued as normal for many people in the region. However, in 1922 the Greek army was defeated by Atatürk's forces and driven back to Smyrna. The population was dealt a serious blow when fire broke out in the European and Armenian areas of the city. Having lost their homes and possessions and fearful of the advancing Turkish Army, people scrambled to get away.

As a consequence many Levantines either made their way back to their countries of origin ( in some cases many decades before) or sought new opportunities in the Americas, Africa or Asia.

Quentin explained what life was like in Smyrna for the 'expats'.

Being a sheltered port in the middle of western Turkey the large quayside was busy with goods being loaded for export or unloaded for onward trade. There was a grand frontage with offices, hotels and warehouses.

Many Europeans, the British included lived in the suburb of Bornova. Although not all of the residents were rich merchants some notable families such as the Whittalls lived in large mansions and were prominent in the community.

There was an Anglican Church and cemetery as well as theatres, newspapers hotels, bars and sports clubs.

Quentin's Levantine heritage: The Gorkiewicz line left Poland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and settled in the Levant. After 1922 many moved to Europe or Beirut. Quentin's grandparents moved to Beirut in 1914.

Other associated families in Quentin's tree were the Van Leppens, Abbotts, Chaunauds, Marraccinis and Borrells.

Quentin's grandfather Marcel Francois Gorkiewicz married Mary Chaunaud, and they lived in Beirut where he worked for the Ottoman Water Company and later a shipping company owned by his cousin.

Well known public figures who have /had a Levantine heritage include, Alec Issigonis, Aristotle Onassis, Jerry Seinfeld and Benedict Cumberbatch.

Quentin concluded by explaining his efforts to find out if he had any Stoneleigh links in his family tree. He was successful in discovering that although it was not Stoneleigh he did have a 9x great grandfather called William Boddington from Brinklow.

William Boddington (1580 – 1647) was a yeoman of 'good estate' from Brinklow and generations of his family were involved in the cloth trade and eventually had trading relations with Smyrna.

5. Sheila thanked Quentin for his presentation and invited questions from the audience.
6. The meeting then broke for refreshments provided by Lisa and Sarah.
7. The meeting finished at 9 pm. The next meeting of the SHS will be in September after the summer break.

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