

Stoneleigh History Society AGM Tuesday March 28 2023

Chairman's Report

It was with enormous relief that we held our 2022 AGM in person rather than via Zoom, feeling that lockdowns were now a thing of the past. Thankfully the year proceeded with only one Covid-related glitch, when our Christmas Social had to be cancelled owing to a number of members succumbing to a variety of viruses. Membership varied little over the year and currently stands at 40. We were however particularly sad to lose two great friends in 2022: David Vaughan, one of the original group who set up the Society, and an invaluable committee member, died in March, and June Burr, a great supporter, died in June. Since November 2022 we have attracted two new members.

Display

Celebration of Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee prompted a gathering-together of village memories during the 70 years of her reign. Villagers were asked to record accounts of their time in Stoneleigh and a compendium of photographs was assembled. We were particularly grateful for the donation of a wonderful collection of pictures from Jackie Sibley, whose father Jack Wallsgrove had been a keen photographer of all things Stoneleigh. Derek Robinson and Rob Orland did a magnificent job of transferring tiny prints into clear A4 versions and together with the written material, collected in three large A4 folders, we were able to mount a display of the village's celebrations of the 1953 Coronation. These were viewed with interest during the village's Jubilee event in the Meadows in June, before being displayed in the Leigh Chapel.

Following the Queen's death and the Accession of King Charles III we shall use this material as the basis for an expanded display being assembled by Lisa Reay and Pam Baker, recording village events at key points in the King's life.

Research and Publications

Many members of the Society are pursuing their own local research interests and it was good, at the end of our January meeting, to hear how some of these are progressing. Pam Baker took on the job of downloading the 1921 Census for Stoneleigh, which is now on our website.

Our website has been entirely rebuilt by Rob Orland and is now much more user-friendly for the administrators. Rob has also taken over hosting, and we feel much more secure in dealing with potential problems on the site. Huge thanks to Rob! The burial database is being updated with records recently provided by the Parish Administrator; the "churchyard project" will continue by its very nature to be ongoing. Queries about family history have come once again from those researching family with Stoneleigh connections and it has been satisfying to be able to respond with useful information from our own website and from our Ancestry page.

Meetings

After our AGM in **March 2022** Peter Huxford, a retired History teacher, spoke to us about the 150 years since the foundation of the National Society for Women's Suffrage. His interesting talk prompted us to question how reforms are implemented.

In **April** Roger Field of the Peel Society, based at Middleton Hall, spoke on Setting up our Police. Roger also drew on his own career in the police force, with some entertaining anecdotes.

Eric Lawley, an administrator at Chedham's Yard, Wellesbourne, spoke to us in **May**. It was an inspiring talk about rescuing a semi-derelict building and business, and showed what enterprising volunteers can do.

After our summer break (we did not have an official outing) in **September** Tony Merrygold of the Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust at Gaydon, gave us a lengthy and detailed talk on "100 years of Jaguar Daimler". His passion for both the cars and the personnel connected with them really shone through.

In **October** we welcomed a most experienced local historian, David Freke of Kineton History Society, who rather overwhelmed us with "Scratching the Surface - medieval graffiti in Warwickshire churches". He revealed an astonishing array of such marks all around us if we are trained to look!

One of our own members, and also a member of the Earlsdon Research Group, John Purcell, gave us a talk in **November** on "Earlsdon's Lost Industrial Heritage". John and the group have thoroughly researched the significant contribution made by this suburb of Coventry.

We welcomed in the new year when, for our **January** meeting, member Peter James continued to tell us about Coventry's industrial past, with "The Grand Complication", which was the name given to a pocket watch made in Coventry for JP Morgan, the famous American banker. As usual Peter's forensic research threw up some extraordinary details and we continue to be grateful to him for revealing so many local stories.

Our final talk of the year, in **February**, saw a welcome return for local historian David Fry, whose "Coventry's Canal: A Hidden History in Plain Sight", gave us a most fascinating insight into the history of this waterway.

2023 sees us with a strong membership, a programme of interesting talks ahead, and a busy time researching and sharing our knowledge. The Chairman thanks, in particular, our Hon. Secretary Margaret Wallis for all her hard work since the Society began. She has been an efficient and good-humoured support and will be much missed as she steps down from the position. Thankyou, indeed, to everyone for their continued enthusiasm – long may it continue!

Sheila Woolf March 2023