

## Stoneleigh History Society AGM Tuesday March 26 2024

### Chairman's Report

This year we were sad to lose another valued member of our Committee, Anthony Bianco, who died in September. Anthony had been a committee member since the Society began, and had been especially active in sourcing funds for us. Whenever help was needed Anthony was one of the first to volunteer, and his enthusiasm for Stoneleigh's history was infectious. We send our condolences to Mel.

We sent our condolences also to Shirley Ball for the loss of her husband Ernie, who had often enjoyed joining our meetings.

### Meetings

After our AGM in **March** we welcomed back Anne Langley, who with her usual thorough research and entertaining illustrations, spoke to us about "Early Allotments in Warwickshire – their contribution to society."

In **April** our speaker was new to us, but provided us with a most thoughtful presentation called "The Blind Postmaster and the Suffragist". This was the story of Henry and Millicent Fawcett, and while many of us will have known something of Millicent, it was interesting to discover the contribution to postal services made by her husband.

**May** brought a talk "out of left field" – "The Fascinating Story of Egg Cups!" It was indeed fascinating, with Dr Javad Hashemi delving into the history – often surprising – of this humble object.

In anticipation of our summer outing, we heard in **June** from Niamh Carton, the Community Engagement Officer for St Mary's Guildhall. Niamh was an entertaining and enthusiastic speaker and thoroughly whetted our appetites for the trip.

After the summer break, in **September** we had another unusual talk, this time from Steve and Sarah Boden on "Pantomimes – Oh Yes We Do!". Steve and Sarah run Imagine Theatre, which for 25 years has provided everything from scripts to costumes for pantomimes throughout the UK. Despite it being a long time till Christmas, we felt very festive at the end of the evening.

Appropriately enough on the night of Hallowe'en, our **October** meeting concerned a spooky story – "The Kilsby Tunnel Murder Mystery 1906". Our speaker, Paul Waddoups, took us through the variety of possibilities leading to the death of a young girl on a train, and we were encouraged to deliver our verdicts.

Our final talk of the year was given in **November** by Christine Cluley who gave us the biography of Cicely Neale, daughter of a Westwood Heath headmaster, who became a suffragette.

The Christmas Social, despite a small number of attendees, was a very pleasant gathering by which to conclude the year.

We resumed in **January** by hearing about a builder/stonemason called William Gascoyne, who was responsible for many of the most prominent buildings in Leamington. Our speaker, Kevin Hunt, had also written a book about the man.

Our final talk, in **February**, was given by the chairman, who had researched the extensive and surprising connections between the villages of Stoneleigh and Ashow in Warwickshire and Hamstall Ridware in Staffordshire.

### **Outings**

In August we followed up the talk on St Mary's Guildhall with a guided tour of the building. It was wonderful to see the refurbished tapestry close up and to have the opportunity to spend as much time as we liked wandering around. The afternoon was finished off perfectly with a splendid cream tea.

We had an extra treat in February between meetings when we were given a private tour of Princethorpe College during their half-term. After an hour-long lecture on the history of the College we were taken around the building, finishing in the extraordinary Pugin chapel. We were grateful to Lisa Reay for organising this and to our guide Alex Darkes, whose knowledge of all things Princethorpe was unrivalled – well, he's been there for 57 years!

### **Display**

In 2022 we had celebrated the Queen's Platinum Jubilee with a large display about the village's history during her 70 years' reign. Later that year, of course, she died, and we turned our thoughts to the new King's Coronation. Lisa Reay put together a fascinating compendium of newspaper articles revealing connections between moments in the King's life and the village, and Pam Baker created a wonderful page-by-page display of the findings.

We may, however, wish to think about the Society's display work in future, since footfall in the Leigh Chapel seems slight.

### **Research and Publications**

Several members continue to research a variety of aspects of local history, whether it be from Coventry's past or from the villages. Jill Kashi, Lisa Reay and Ian Harrop continue to work on the history of Westwood Heath, and Rob Orland, Peter Thompson and Pete James on Coventry. Maggie Moorhouse has worked on personalities connected with the Charterhouse, and Sheila Woolf has published another book – *A Vanished World – the Reminiscences of Mary Cordelia Leigh*, which was launched at Ashow Church in June.

2024 sees us with a membership of 39, a programme of interesting talks ahead, and a busy time researching and sharing our knowledge. The Chairman thanks, in particular, Margaret Wallis, who stepped down in 2023 as Hon. Secretary after occupying the role since the Society began, and Sue Crofts, who has seamlessly added the role of Secretary to her existing one of Treasurer! Thankyou to all those who have provided refreshments, indeed, to everyone for their continued enthusiasm – long may it continue!

*Sheila Woolf, Chair March 2024*