

Stoneleigh History Society AGM Tuesday 26 March 2019

Chairman's Report

Once again this has been a very busy year for the society, and although our display was "hidden" whilst the church was unavoidably closed, we have maintained a high profile in a variety of other ways. We have lost a few members, sadly, and we extend our best wishes to the family of the late David Brooks; we also extend good wishes to those members who have moved away from Stoneleigh or who now find that distance prevents regular attendance at our meetings. We currently have 44 members.

Events and Displays

Our display on the history of the church remained in place throughout the year and despite the summer closure attracted many positive comments later in the year. Several tours of the village and church were given, which culminated in visitors viewing our display and our resources in the Leigh Chapel. Many vowed to return, as there was so much to see! The display will stay "in situ" during 2019.

A new local history group has begun at Westwood Heath, and since this is so closely allied to Stoneleigh, the new members paid a visit here to see what we have achieved. They were impressed!

In May a special service of dedication was held at the church to celebrate the publication of a booklet on the "Stoneleigh Stitchers." Margaret Wallis and Margaret Brown worked hard to prepare this publication about the creation of the church tapestry cushions. Derek Robinson photographed them all with great skill. Past SHS member Eileen Burman had left a legacy designed to pay for this publication, and we were pleased to welcome her daughter Clare and grandchildren to the dedication.

Another publication which provided us with a special celebratory event, was Philip Gill's book on the Almshouse Residents between 1841 and 1901. Many of the current residents joined us for the evening, and the publication was a runaway success, almost selling out very quickly.

We had a presence once again at the Duck Race, not only in the Leigh Chapel but also selling Stoneleigh calendars (see later in this report).

In November we held a commemoration of the end of the First World War. This was in collaboration with the Stoneleigh Male Voice Choir and was held at the church. A moving evening of song, readings and Stoneleigh-focussed narrative brought home the "sad gladness" of that occasion 100 years ago. Many members of the society were involved in this event, which raised over £1700 for the church and the Poppy Appeal. It was particularly special to welcome descendants of those who had served. We were grateful for a contribution from Warwick District Council, which covered the costs of the event.

Research and Publications

The churchyard project has continued to progress: there are now around 1500 burials photographed, researched and written about. Most sections of the churchyard are complete, with only the cremations area still to be written up. Congratulations and thanks are particularly due to Derek Robinson who has photographed every grave and who has done a great deal of bramble-clearance in the process. It has been a fascinating project and members are encouraged to visit the Burials Database on the society's website. We have had over 5,000 "hits" on the website and our Ancestry family tree has 10,000 individuals named on it! The many enquiries about family history research from people around the world have been made much easier to answer as our knowledge has increased.

Our booklets in the Leigh Chapel have proved to be popular sales items, and many have also been sold at talks given by the chairman. The Almshouse Residents book and the Stitchers booklet have sold well, as noted. The chairman has written two more Austen-focussed booklets which are also selling well.

Our calendar for 2019 which comprised photographs by the late Will Blagburn sold particularly well: 300 copies were designed and printed by the society and after costs all profits went to Myton Hospice, where Will and so many other local people have received such good care. We were delighted to present the hospice with a cheque for £1360 in February.

A book on the history of Stoneleigh School is currently in preparation and will be published in September 2019.

Meetings

Our **March 2018** meeting, as well as being the AGM, saw a visit from Professor Beat Kumin of the University of Warwick who presented a potted history of the structure of parishes from the early 14th century to the present day. This was an entertaining and revealing talk on an unusual aspect of our history.

In April we visited Merevale Hall, sadly on an extremely rainy day, which prevented enjoyment of the gardens and views. Nevertheless it was an interesting excursion, led by Sir William Dugdale himself.

In May we commemorated the centenary of women's suffrage with a talk by another Warwick academic, Dr Sarah Richardson, whose focus was particularly on the women of Warwickshire who made a contribution to the struggle for women's rights.

At June's meeting Philip Gill launched his book on the almshouses, as noted. Philip's researches into the lives of those residents who lived there between 1841 and 1911 were meticulous and extensive, and we congratulate him on adding so usefully to our knowledge.

As usual there was no meeting in **July** or **August**.

In September Shirley Ball gave another slide-show of her pictures relating to the village school. This was popular as ever and we welcomed a good number of former pupils who shared their memories.

In October our speaker was Dr Richard Churchley, who gave us a most entertaining evening of folksongs from Warwickshire and Worcestershire. Audience participation was a must!

Our **November** meeting was on researching and writing family history, with Mike Sharpe. We were given a great many ideas about how and where to discover facts about our ancestors, and options about how to display our findings.

Our traditional **December** Christmas Social provided a relaxing opportunity to chat, eat and drink in the village hall.

There was no meeting in **January**, and our year was completed in **February** with a visit from Stuart Green. Stuart, a former resident of Stoneleigh, spoke movingly about his father's war service in Bomber Command, and shared his experiences of discovering his father's story.

Personnel and Affiliations

We have now affiliated ourselves to the British Association for Local History, which enables us not only to receive publications and information about events of interest, but which also provides us with essential Public Liability Insurance for our meetings and trips. We continue to be affiliated to the Warwickshire Local History Society, whose meetings are free to us as a consequence.

The Chairman would particularly like to thank **all** members of the committee for another year of hard work for the Society, and to all our members who support meetings with their attendance each month; help with refreshments is especially appreciated!

We look forward in 2019 to another year filled with interest and discovery.

Sheila Woolf March 2019