

Stoneleigh History Society AGM Tuesday March 27th 2012

Chairman's Report

Meetings

The inaugural meeting of the Society was held on January 26th 2011, a committee was elected on February 7th and a Constitution adopted on March 24th – many thanks to David Vaughan for his work on this. The committee has since met twice.

Early general meetings concentrated on sharing ideas about projects to be pursued, and a particularly successful evening was held when members – and visitors – brought photographs and memorabilia to share with the group. The majority of meetings have consisted of hearing about the progress of individual research projects (see later). Pam Baker gave a fascinating presentation on mapping the village from the 1810 map onwards, revealing some surprising additions and omissions in the housing stock! Sheila Woolf spoke on her investigations into the history of the Swan Inn, and in November gave a “taster” talk on the subject of her forthcoming book on Cordelia Leigh. In February we welcomed our first “outside speaker”, David Clark, who gave a memorable lecture on the history of Ashow. This was also our first meeting at the Village Hall, as we have now outgrown our initial venue, the Village Club. We should however like to thank the Club for their hospitality in 2011.

Visits

Two visits were made in March 2011 to the Warwick Record Office when almost all members were given tours of the archives and advice on how to access them. The chairman was invited to a meeting of the Warwickshire Local History Society in Warwick which had been convened to discover how best this “umbrella” organisation might assist local societies within the county. Consequent upon this the SHS became affiliated to the WLHS which gives us free entry to their lectures. Details of other local societies' activities are published by the WLHS and in July some members visited the Stretton-on-Dunsmore society's 10-year celebrations and in October their lecture on their census projects. Another interesting lecture on House History at the Coventry Family History Society was also attended. These visits have helped considerably in pointing the way forward for our own society. Many other visits have been made independently or in small groups to the record offices at Warwick and Stratford, to Stoneleigh Abbey's archive and to the RASE library at Stoneleigh Park.

Displays/talks

The 2011 Duck Race event provided a platform for our first village display in the church, celebrating the 160th anniversary of the Forge. A wide variety of material was assembled, comprising a history of village blacksmiths from the late sixteenth century, photographic and written evidence of notable smiths and farriers and a compendium of census data from 1851, analysed by Pam Baker to reveal the social make-up of the village at that time. The display elicited a lot of interest and attracted new members to the society; it was repeated in October when the Royal Leamington Spa Decorative and Fine Arts Society held its new members' morning in the church. We are currently working on a more complex display to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee; this will be advertised as part of Leamington History Festival.

Shirley Ball gave another talk about her photographic collection to a packed audience in the Hall and raised a considerable amount of money to aid church funds. Sheila Woolf has continued to give talks around the county on her book about Stoneleigh men who served in the First World War.

Research

Despite the short time in which the Society has existed, a great deal of research has been undertaken. In addition to that noted above, other ongoing research includes

- Land-use, including enclosure (David Brooks)
- A history of the church and of the school (Roger Gilbert)
- Wentworth House, its history and former occupants (David and Jean Vaughan)
- The almshouses (both old and new) and their occupants (Philip and Rachel Gill)
- House occupancy and development in Birmingham Road (Lisa Reay)
- Crewe Farm and surrounding area (Anthony Bianco)

- Manor Farm, its history and former occupants (Pam Baker)
- Oral history – interviewing and recording recollections of older villagers (various members)

Increasing availability of online resources and a CD of Stoneleigh Births/Marriages/Burials is enabling a great deal of genealogical and historical research by many members of the Society pursuing their own interests. A greater familiarity with these resources is also allowing us to respond to a growing number of enquiries (via the village website) from members of the public about family history. We await a forthcoming transcription of the Stoneleigh School logbooks being prepared by a Warwickshire volunteer, which will be a similarly useful resource.

Conclusion

Membership of the society now stands at 20 and we have welcomed many more visiting non-members to our meetings. Our resources are growing and it is a measure of our success that we have had to move to a larger venue. The Chairman would like to thank all members of the Committee for their considerable input in this first year: everything from the creation of membership cards to the management of finances and the compilation of Minutes has been undertaken with efficiency and great good humour. The future looks bright.

Sheila Woolf