

Stoneleigh History Society AGM Tuesday March 26th 2013

Chairman's Report

Meetings

Since our first AGM, in March 2012, the Society has continued to be very active. At that meeting we heard an excellent presentation by Patrick McIlroy on his supervision of the restoration of the Repton Landscape at Stoneleigh Abbey, accompanied by many photographs of the work in progress. All our subsequent talks have been given by our own members, which is a measure of their breadth of research and variety of interests. In May Peter James spoke to us about his extensive family history research, going back as far as the sixteenth century in Stareton; at the same meeting Philip Gill gave us a taster of his investigations into the lives of former residents of the Almshouses. A similar "double-act", this time of Lisa Reay and Sheila Woolf, provided interest as they spoke, respectively, about the houses (and their occupants) in Birmingham Road, and some aspects of the history of the school, its pupils and head-teachers. In the autumn we heard, first, from Pam Baker on some unusual aspects of life in Ashow in the eighteenth century – the provision of funeral outfitting for the burial of the Rector of Ashow in 1732. This talk was accompanied by an informal one from Sheila Skinner- not a member but one with life-long connections to Stoneleigh- about her family's life at Pear Tree Cottage. In November David Brooks gave us a flavour of his ongoing research into land-use in the parish, from the very earliest times of cultivating the land. After our winter break we were given a presentation by Nora and Will Blagburn about their early memories of moving to Stoneleigh, where they have lived now for more than 50 years, and of the many activities in which they have played a major part over those years. In addition to these formal talks, in October we repeated last year's successful "bring and show" event, which elicited some quite extraordinary exhibits and which provided many members with happy wanderings down "memory lane." Our Christmas Social in the Club was well attended and enjoyed by all.

Visits

In April David Brooks arranged for several members to visit the RASE library at Stoneleigh Park, where we were shown an extensive selection of the historic collection there. Following the March talk on the Abbey's landscape restoration, in June we were given a "Repton Tour" by Paula Cornwell, the Abbey's curator/manager. One of the few sunny evenings of summer 2012 provided us with a splendid tour of the grounds. Our affiliation to the Warwickshire Local History Society has enabled members to attend a variety of talks and events under the auspices of this organisation, including Lisa Reay's participation in a day-school on "Publication" and a visit made by a small group to the restored chapel at Compton Verney. Many other visits have been made independently or in small groups to the record offices at Warwick and Stratford, and to Stoneleigh Abbey's archive.

Displays / talks

Our major display of 2012 was a celebration of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee; this was advertised as part of the Leamington History Festival and as such attracted visitors to the church from a wider area. Many members contributed to the great success of the exhibition, which formed a part of the village's Jubilee Celebrations, and much of the display is being repeated this year, since 2013 is of course the actual Diamond Anniversary of the Coronation! We are grateful to the church for having allowed us space for the exhibition in the Leigh Chapel, and delighted that this will now provide a permanent home for future displays. Many of our small publications were also displayed and sold at the village Elizabethan Fayre in November. Sheila Woolf has continued to give talks around the county on a variety of Stoneleigh-related topics; in October she gave a special talk on village history to raise funds for the Church Roof Appeal, and November saw the launch in the church of *A Strange Time, the War Diary and Scrapbooks of Cordelia Leigh*, which she

co-edited with Chris Holland. Both events drew large audiences and together raised around £1000 for the Appeal.

Research

A great deal of research continues to be undertaken. It includes:

- Land-use, including enclosure (David Brooks)
- 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)
- Manor Farm, its history and former occupants (Pam Baker)
- The Leigh family (Sheila Woolf)

In addition, the Society is increasingly contacted by people wishing to discover more about their family history, and this is providing greater knowledge about former residents.

Publications / Resources

We acknowledge with gratitude the voluntary transcription of the Stoneleigh School Logbooks 1864-1906 by Mrs Joyce Taylor. Mr and Mrs Taylor have been made Honorary Members of the Society as a “thank-you” for this invaluable aid to research. We are also grateful to local residents for the many photographs and books donated to us. We now hold a number of CDs which can be borrowed by any member of the society; in addition we have published a small number of booklets.

Conclusion

Membership of the society now stands at 32 and we have welcomed several visiting non-members to our meetings. The Chairman would like to thank all members of the society for their continued attendance, and in particular the Committee for their time, energy and practical support.

Sheila Woolf