

Stoneleigh History Society AGM Tuesday March 25th 2014

Chairman's Report

Meetings

Once again we have had a very full year. At last year's AGM we had a fascinating presentation from Bruce Smith on Drovers' Roads, and the possibility of one of them having bisected the village. Bruce had made a couple of visits to the area prior to his talk – including one in which he had traversed the grounds of Coventry Golf Club! – but his conclusion were... “inconclusive”. He did provide us with Ogilby's stunning map of drovers' roads and subsequently we were able to trace interesting local routes. In April we had a “workshop” meeting at which all members were invited to discuss their own research interests, their thoughts about future projects for the society and their feelings about the society's meetings. The findings were useful and have provided the basis for considerations of new areas of research. In May our meeting was a “double act” of Sheila Woolf and David Vaughan, who spoke, respectively, about the Reverend James Wentworth Leigh, erstwhile vicar of Stoneleigh, and Wentworth House, originally the village workhouse, later the vicarage and now a private house. As usual we had no meetings in July or August but our autumn programme got off to a fine start with Pete James reprising his talk on the history of Stareton families, together with an extremely useful explanation of how to cope with “old” handwriting. In October, another treat: Pam Baker memorably described her investigations into “The Disbursements of the Churchwardens 1663”. Our November meeting saw a visitor from Stoneleigh Abbey, Paul Smith, giving us a detailed presentation on the life of Sir Edward Chandos Leigh and his association with cricket; this concluded by looking at the history of Stoneleigh Cricket Club itself. At Christmas, as usual, we had no official meeting, but an informal gathering at the Club, the highlight of which this year was the “unveiling” of our new website. Similarly in January some members met at the Club to chat about their researches. After this winter break we resumed our formal meetings in February with a full house for one of Shirley Ball's ever-popular trips down memory lane via a super selection of old photographs.

Visits

A glorious evening in June (which heralded the beautiful summer to come) saw us visiting Baginton, where we were given a guided tour by an archaeologist of the new visitor attractions at Bagot's Castle; later we were given special access to the lovely church of St John the Baptist. On several occasions members have taken the opportunity to attend meetings of the WLHS to which we are affiliated, and in particular enjoyed the December outing to Lord Leycester's Hospital and St Mary's Church in Warwick. As usual many independent visits have been made to local record offices and archives.

Displays

Perhaps one of the most significant aspects of the Society's year has been the ability to display our materials on a permanent basis in the Leigh Chapel of the church. For this we are most grateful to the PCC for their permission. We are also grateful to member Liz Sykes for donating display boards. We now have available two extensive boards showing Roger Gilbert's excellent pictures of the village's houses, as well as a number of binders holding old photographs. It has been a particular pleasure to receive these from interested villagers who have come to see our displays. We are also able on special occasions: “Leamington Looks Back” fortnight, Duck Race Day and Heritage Weekend, to make available some transcriptions of our school log-books and parish registers, as well as a selection of our books and booklets. Our major exhibition of 2013, which remains *in situ*, was the production of a Stoneleigh Timeline comprising some 60 pages which gave a brief outline of significant moments in Stoneleigh's history. It is hoped that when time permits these can be used as a basis for more detailed descriptions.

In addition to the physical display of material we now have our own website www.stoneleighhistorysociety.org.uk where several of our publications can be read online; this includes pages from the Timeline. We are grateful to Mark Bonnett for helping us to set up the site.

Publications/Resources/Outreach

We now hold a significant number of photographs, CDs and documents; a perennial problem is how to house these securely, in addition to those which are on display. We hope that uploading some to the website will be a help in this respect. Our booklet publications continue to grow, with the addition of Pam Baker's “Disbursements”, Pete

James' "Stareton People" and David Vaughan's "History of Wentworth House". We now have, thanks to Mr and Mrs Vince Taylor, further transcriptions of the school log-book, which takes us up to 1923. We are grateful to Derek Robinson who has made available his extensive collection of photographs both old and new, of Stoneleigh. The Chairman has continued to give talks on aspects of our history to many local groups, as well as tours of the village.

Research

Individual members continue research in many areas. There has been a great expansion of our Ancestry website "SHS" which has drawn contributions from many people around the world with family connections to Stoneleigh. Thanks largely to Lisa Reay's initiative, this has greatly extended our knowledge of people from the village's past. Assistance has frequently been given to family historians who have contacted us with queries regarding Stoneleigh ancestors. Our focus for 2014 will be on the men from Stoneleigh who fought in the Great War, and much research has already been carried out in the last six months. Our 2014 exhibition will concentrate on commemorating the centenary of the war.

Conclusion

We have a strong current membership of 36 and frequently welcome guests to our meetings. There is much enthusiasm for future projects and the Society can look forward to extending its knowledge of Stoneleigh's heritage. The Chairman would like to thank all members for their continued support, and in particular the Committee for their unfailing interest and energy. Particular thanks go to retiring Committee member Philip Gill for his wise contributions to our deliberations.

Sheila Woolf March 2014