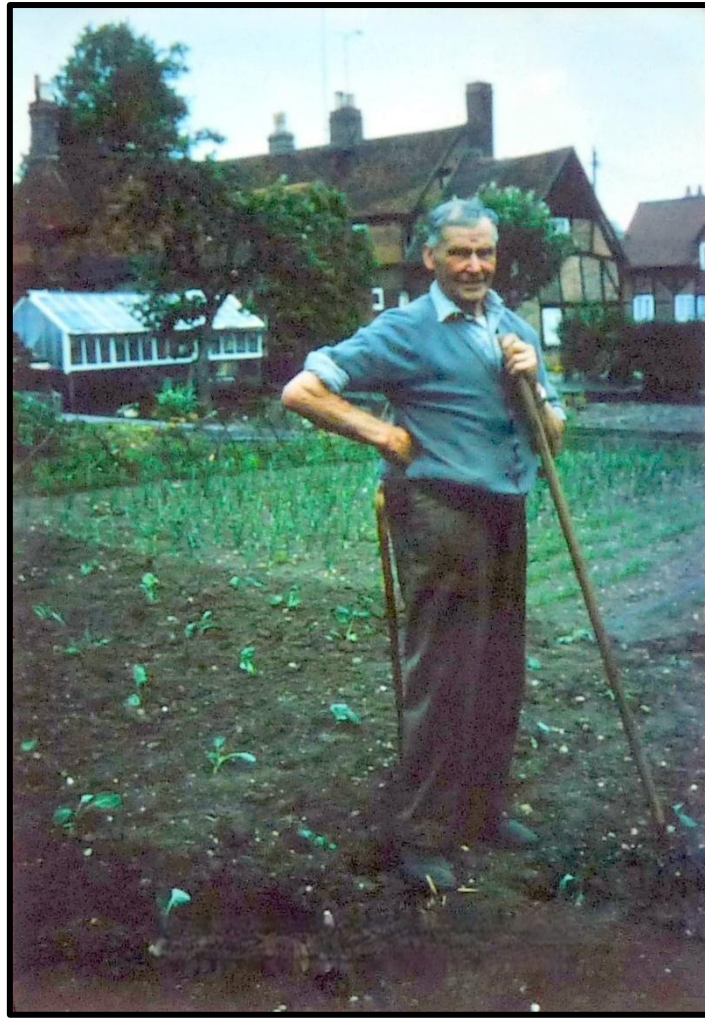




Harry Edmunds' Diary

*Recollections of Life in Stoneleigh in the first half of
the twentieth century*

The reminiscences contained in this booklet were written down by Mr Harry Edmunds over a period of time in the late 1970s. Born in 1897 he was christened Rupert Henry; as a young lad he lived on The Bank but later moved to Birmingham Road. In October 1920 he married Annie, the cook for the Reverend Herbert Cooke, and they lived in the Almshouses, bringing up three children. Later they moved to the New Almshouses before moving to Bridge End in 1939, where their fourth child, Shirley, was born in 1941. Harry lost his leg due to diabetes in 1972, but was soon back in his garden, even hoeing the paths from his wheelchair; he was digging and hoeing right up to his death in 1978. In his last years he set about writing about the village he loved - a village which seems barely recognisable today. Most people worked for the Stoneleigh Estate and there was a real sense of community as well as a close connection with nature.

Harry's daughter Shirley, now Shirley Ball, has for many years delighted local audiences with her recollections of "old" Stoneleigh, together with an extensive assortment of old photographs to illustrate her talks. My grateful thanks go to her for making her father's reminiscences available to a wider public, and to Will Blagburn for photographing the original script. With the exception of the photograph of the fire engine, which comes courtesy of Colin Parker, all the photographs are from Shirley's collection. Many of these are now available on the Stoneleigh History Society website, www.stoneleighhistorysociety.org.uk

In transcribing this "diary" I have resisted the temptation to reorganise the material into "topics", feeling it preferable to retain the authenticity of the random nature of Harry's memories. Similarly, I have only occasionally tidied up grammar where clarification of meaning was needed.

Sheila Woolf, May 2010

1900: the big flood, when G Keen and H. Hibbert were drowned. Hibbert was found the same day, and G. Keen was found in the back wash at Stoneleigh Abbey. The river rose very quickly, and my mother took us down to the church and the water was level with the stone at the church door. From there she took us down to Walton's Field and we were just in time to see a fowl pen full of chickens go floating down the river, and when we were coming back home, Mr Adcock had just been to get the Co-Op horse out of his stable and he told my mother he was lucky to be alive: the water nearly took him away as it was up the sides of the horse. The next day we went to see the bridge at Motslow Hill and the water had lifted the bridge off its buttresses and it lay on the side of the river.

The next thing I remember was the Coronation of King Edward the Seventh. There were two marquees and merry go rounds, coconut shies and races for the children and a mug for every child. One marquee was for food and the other for drinking, and a big band. In 1905 Lord Leigh passed on and all the school children lined up on either side of the footpath from the church gates to Motslow Bridge. Before he died he used to entertain all the tenants to a dinner and sports every September, they used to come in the old Warwickshire wagons from Westwood Heath, Leek Wootton, Hill Wootton and Stoneleigh and all the food used to be cooked in the Stoneleigh Abbey kitchens. It was what people used to call a Wake. At that time Lord Leigh used to drive his own brougham to church on Sunday, it was then that the public house was made outdoors.

In 1908 and 1909 we had two big barn fires at Kingswood Cottages, it was all hands to the pump. The Reverend Noble Page went to London for an operation for appendicitis. It was a sad end when he passed on. It was in the same year the first bus made at the Daimler was brought to test it up Stoneleigh Hill and when it got half way up it stopped, and when it started coming back down the hill it ran up the bank, tipped over and burst into flames. That happened at four o'clock in the afternoon. I stood and watched it myself at the bottom of the hill. It was in the same year the Reverend Cooke got married and brought his bride home, and the school children lined both sides of the road by the school.

It was in 1915 when I was working at the ordnance works that we had an explosion in the boiler house, and when I came round I was lying in the manager's office and all the men had been sent home for a few days. While at home all the young men from the village volunteered for the army, except mypal and I failed: they said they wanted men not lads, so we came back and joined Lord Derby's Scheme and were called up 3 months later. During that time the Zeppelin came over and dropped bombs on Whitley Aerodrome and killed 3 cows.

After the war Lord Leigh gave the village a piece of land to be called Stoneleigh Village Sports Centre and some of the unemployed were given some work to level it, and volunteers used to go and put a fence round it. We made a bowling green, tennis courts and a football field and then some people went to Derby and bought a large army hut and Lord Leigh sent his Sentinel to cart the hut home. Everybody in the village worked on it for many weeks. All those who came back from the war used to go round the village and planted the gardens for all the widows and the cripples; also, we used to get up whist drives and dances for those who had lost relatives in the war.

I remember in the olden days we used to have a real good dinner at the Club. The Committee used to take the meat and one or two in the village used to boil legs of lamb and members' wives used to cook potatoes and Brussels in the school and carry them over to the club. It used to be the Saturday after November the 5th that was the anniversary of the opening of the Village Working Men's Club and the Club used to have free beer that night. And then we went round Carol Singing to help get brass band instruments which we eventually got and our first engagement was at Baginton helped by some members of the Coventry Silver band. After that we used to play for our own Flower Show and Sports.

In that year my late wife and I got married and lived in the Old Almshouses. The following year we were blessed with twins, a girl and a boy, and about 5 months later Lord Leigh and his American bride came to see them. Lord Leigh congratulated us as they were the only twins to be born in the almshouses, at that time. The old people there, the men had L.L. on their sleeves and the ladies had L.L. on their cloaks.

About the same time some were struck by lightning on the front lawn at Stoneleigh Abbey. One was killed on the spot and the other two were maimed for life; it thundered and lightened all that day.

In 1926 I changed my job and worked for the nicest people and we used to go every August and stayed in the house and looked after it. During one stay we had a thunder bolt in the house and my wife and house maid came running through fire and two men were leading me to the back door. I had lost my sight. One hour later the family arrived back from holiday at Borth in Wales. I got my sight two days later and I have never liked thunderstorms since.

1926 was a terrible year for marches and unemployment. I never want to see any more such in my life time. In 1928 it was a terrible hot summer - that was the year they made Armorial Road and there was still a lot of unemployment. My Uncle Ted and family lived in the Railway Cottages at Styvechale. That was the time they made the new road by Styvechale Church and did away with the Cabbage Close, a short cut to cut what was called Cabbage Close Corner. It was in the early 30s they laid out houses and gardens on either side of Armorial Road. It was then that I started as a landscape gardener and it was there I laid out my first gardens and did all the crazy paving making a complete job. It was after that I had two old gardeners who helped to complete 10 more lovely gardens down that same road. I made a rose garden down there for the person who owned the Foleshill garage. I got that busy I had another old gardener making four of us.

When I was at school I finished top scholar of the school when I was 12 years old. During that time a little old chimney sweep used to come to the village with his truck and sweeping brushes and Mr Fardon - who lived in the village and used to make roses and tulips out of iron – he made the iron gates outside the Bank at Coventry and he made the first bicycle before selling it to Starley of Coventry – when the sweep left his brushes while he went round to get orders to sweep chimneys, he used to get the big boys to hide his brushes and he used to give those who hid them one penny each.

The first aeroplane I saw was when I was ploughing a field for Mr Ben French a fortnight after leaving school and the horses ran away with me and the

plough got stuck in a gap in the hedge. The aeroplane was going to Rugby from Westwood Heath Sports and it was enough to frighten anybody. I know I went round the village telling folks what I had seen.

After the war I used to help mow the church yard twice a year, there were two road men and Mr Robert Harris the sexton and I helped do that for eighteen years and his two sons used to clip round the grave stones and then rake up the grass. It used to look lovely when it was done. It used to be 6d an hour.

During 1932 we had a very bad flood and on the main road it was eighteen inches deep and it ran through the houses opposite to where I now live and it was followed by a dry summer when it was very hot and the harvest was very early. It was then that Armstrong Whitworth started to build their....at the factory at Baginton. We went for a holiday that year and the price for the railway journey was the same as it was for years: to travel to Wales was fourteen and sixpence return to Welshpool and four shillings and nine pence to Aber....and back, 52 miles. We used to go to Aber whenever we went to Wales for our holidays, and also we used to go to Lord P...at Welshpool Castle and also to Cromwell's Well at the top of the Black Mountains where Cromwell shelled Welshpool Castle.

During that time I was appointed Social Secretary and I used to run outings by the Midland Red Omnibus Co. We used to have outings for members and their families.....in the month it used to be one shilling for adults and sixpence for children. They used to run a bus every Saturday afternoon at two o'clock for Stoneleigh only, and we used to have a yearly trip to Blackpool lights for many years and stayed at the same place for a number of years. It used to be one pound ten shillings each for the trip.

It was while at school in the Spring and Summer months we used to have paper chasing twice a month for standard four, five, six and seven, and two of the eldest used to be given half an hour start on a seven mile run. I don't think I gave you the name of our vicar. It was Cyril John Noble Page – he was not here for long but he took a great interest in the old people of the village. When I left school my employer gave me a solid tyre bicycle to learn to ride. They were terrible to ride. I soon sold it for five shillings and bought a cycle that ran on air. It cost me two pounds. Before I left school there was a coal

man and his son, William Smith, used to bring coal round the village and he used to come from Bedworth very week. He used to weigh the coal on scales hanging on the back of his cart and his price was 8d a hundredweight. I remember one day he told my mother he gave a woman in the village a ride into town and when they got there the woman's face was like a sweep – she never asked for another ride.

I remember at the Coronation of King George the Fifth the shepherd and the coal man at the Manor House got drunk in the afternoon and started fighting. They both fell into the sack pit in the farmyard – Sam Gallimore and Robert Reeves – and there were crowds of people watched them fight – they were really times, especially for the children running races of all kinds from early morning to late at night.

When we had King George the Sixth I think they were the best of all. One race they had in the football field was to walk backwards from one goalpost to the other and it was won easily by Seymour Burberry. It was a proper laugh – he sat down waiting for the others.

I remember during the early 1930s I went to London with the Chairman of the Stoneleigh Parish Council to arrange for the lighting and ...act to operate in Stoneleigh Village, and at a later date I went with our chairman for the parish council Mr Percy Rowland Hill to arrange with the Coventry City Council for people in the Stoneleigh parish to be cremated at Coventry Crematorium. We also had electric light brought into the village, after it was put into Ashow via Stoneleigh Abbey. It was lovely to have in the homes, and soon after Coventry Corporation brought the piped drinking water into the homes in the village. It was not until 1952 that the village had the sewer put into the village but it was years after before they started putting the pipes into the houses.

I used to be a member of the Parish Council for 20 years, Secretary of the Sick for 22 years, member of the Stoneleigh Village Club Committee 24 years. My mother was born in Stoneleigh and my grandparents dating back several hundred years. All were workers for the Stoneleigh Estate – it used to be all people living in the village had to work on the estate or on the farms. Miss Ginny Sibley used to be sewing maid at the Abbey. I remember when I

was young the village policeman once summoned some young fellows and took them to court and the next day he was sent to another area.

Miss Cordelia Leigh used to have a Bible Class at Stoneleigh Abbey every Sunday afternoon and used to come to Stoneleigh school 2 and 3 times every week and take a class for one hour on Religion. I won a lovely book called *Robinson Crusoe* for an essay on kindness to dumb animals. After I left school they started a Church Lads Brigade on Tuesday evening, Woodwork class on Monday evening and First aid on Friday evening.

In the late 1910s the present Lord Leigh had a group of Scouts and he used to have them down at Stoneleigh Abbey. In the 1930s Lord Leigh used to have his own troops to camp out at Mr Adcock's farm and used to invite police and police specials for an evening during their stay.

I often think about the times when we were at school, we used to go down to the Abbey and fetch dripping from the kitchen and we had to go early and be back for school, and in the holidays we used to go and keep the cows off the cricket pitch and we used to go and open the farm gates for brake loads of people to go through and they used to throw halfpennies and pennies and we used to scramble for them. When we went home we used to have to take our truck for the acorns which our mother used to pick up and then the farmer used to come and measure them – they paid 3d a bushel.

It was during the First World War my mother and two more used to work on the Stoneleigh Estate. They used to work on the land from eight o'clock in the morning till six in the afternoon and 12 o'clock on Saturday. When we were young our mothers used to take us once a month to Coventry pushing the prams and we used to come back in the milk wagon. We used to wait outside the Railway Inn up the Station Hill – that was the only means of transport in those days.

I remember when I started work I used to walk with my uncle three miles away and one day we were walking home and a brand new car pulled up behind us. It was Mr William Metters and he told us to get in but don't scratch the paint, so that was the first time I had a ride in a motor car. That was a brand new Hillman car in 1910. In 1932 a student living at the Quadrant stole a car in Coventry and drove it up to the top of Stoneleigh Hill, turned it round

and drove it down the hill and crashed it into the poplar trees at the bottom of the hill during Saturday lunchtime and exactly three weeks later a fellow did the same thing with a motorbike.

During my schooldays I used to go out with the school master in his motorbike and sidecar for company to collect the rates. We used to go all round the farms round Stoneleigh and Westwood Heath and they used to give me a glass of milk. Very often he had to go back again and before he had his motorbicycle he used to go in his pony and trap which he used to keep at the school. For years we used to have a horse and float at night and go and collect firewood for the bonfire on the fifth of November. I remember one year Mr Fardon had a load of kids of firewood and one night when he went out we fetched half of his wood and stacked it on the bonfire, but when he found out where it had gone he carried on alarming and said he would not let us have the bonfire in his field again, but by the time came round again he had forgotten all about it. Mr L Fardon was a very kind old man and his wife was a real old lady. Mr Fardon had two big cherry trees in his garden and a big pear tree at the back of his workshop and every year he used to give every infant a pear, and a few cherries to the ones upstairs. His workmen used to put big nets over the cherry trees and when they were ripe his men used to pick them for him. He had a daughter, she was a trained nurse and if any children hurt themselves she used to bandage them up. Her name was Malvina, she married later and had a family of three girls.

I remember when I was young there used to be a field of allotments and our parents used to grow corn on them and when the corn was ripe the men used to mow it with scythes and then tie it up and when they stacked it each one had a stack of his own. The stacks were all put by the gateway and when the machine came to thresh it they all joined in and helped one another and then they used to take it to Baginton Mill and have it ground into meal for their pigs. It used to be a royal day when the threshing machine came – that was by the cross road at Stoneleigh. There used to be another allotment field which was known as Van Diemann's Allotment. In that field the allotments used to be one third of an acre. It used to be a lovely sight on Good Friday morning to see all the families up there. I always used to say it was a lovely

picture but I am afraid now the gardens have lost their beauty and now no village policeman walking about.

Everyone can say what they like – my parents always used to say your school days are the happiest days of your life and I do believe it true. I always loved my school and the teachers used to be so happy with all of us. We used to have a teacher from Cubbington, her name was Miss Knight and she was killed riding her bicycle at Cubbington Crossroad.

I have been listening to stories about people coming into the village to work. The first one was Mr J King who came to work as head waggoner for Mr W Metters, a farmer, and his first day's work was to plough with four other teams of horses and they used to come up the village at 7 o'clock in the morning and return back at four thirty in the evening. Mr King's horses were both black and with white on their forelegs. Two days later Mr King came to my father to cut his hair and my brother Jack and I held a candle each side while my father cut off his hair and I remember part of this conversation. The next was Mr W Smith – he moved into the thatched cottage opposite what used to be the village public house and his youngest son was two years older than me, and he remembers Mr Ernest King going into the next class by him. The next was Mr John Thorley who came to live in the old police house next to my mother and the next morning the school master came and asked me to let the new lad, G. Thorley, sit by me – he came from Bishop's Tachbrook.

Before getting too far away from my childhood I would like to say we had a lovely lot of teachers. Mr Smith was the infants' teacher and was replaced by a teacher the name of Miss Loveland who three years later became Mrs Frank Walton the funeral furnisher and they had a son and a daughter who both spent their school days at Stoneleigh School. There were two sisters Miss Knight from Cubbington who was in charge of Standards I II and III and Mrs Wells who was in charge of Standards IV V VI and VII, and then we had a school attendance officer who used to call every ten days and the vicar John Noble Page and Miss Cordelia Leigh used to call in very often.

Mrs W H Metters used to be wonderful good to all the children of the village, and once my father was scorched on his leg and it turned septic and he was at home for eight weeks: different people used to call each Friday and give

my mother seven and sixpence to buy some food for us, and Miss Cordelia Leigh and her sister Miss Agnes Leigh used to call every week to see how he was and Lord Leigh's keeper Mr Mills brought some rabbits. In those days things were very bad, my father's wage was 13 shillings a week. My mother used to sit up till eleven and twelve o'clock at night making us trousers out of someone's old clothes. But in those days when anyone came to see my father we weren't allowed to speak, and it was upstairs at eight thirty.

At that time my father would be in the garden at four in the morning and on the way to work. We were always learned to respect our elders and to help old people. When we came out of school I had to take my uncle John Goode for a little walk up to the cross road. He had cancer in the throat; he was head waggoner on Lord Leigh's farm stables and do all the timber hauling. He had three big timber horses and Mr Sparrow the blacksmith used to shoe them every month and his partner was Mr George Hinton, he used to be the pig killer for Stoneleigh. In those days nearly every cottage kept a pig.

In those days before the first world war we used to have a first class amateur cricket team and it was captained by Mr G Brown, vice captain Frank Lees and all the rest of the players were from Stoneleigh. There was also a good class football team in the village run by Stoneleigh players right up to the beginning of the first world war when the players all joined the forces including our vicar the Reverend Cooke. We had a wonderful roll call from the village, our scroll was hung in the Victory Hall in the village. After the war we used to have church parade every year meeting at Cloud Bridge, joined by men from Bubbenhall and Baginton, and held our annual service on the village green led by the band of Weston training school, led by their bandmaster Mr Frank Sabin and Major Dick led the parade and then arched back to Bubbenhall for dismissal, and it was well patronised.



Marching Band led by John Thorley



Floods in 1932



Stoneleigh Abbey Fire Brigade



Coventry Road



Children in Birmingham Road



A "Sentinel" engine from Stoneleigh Abbey

For many years my father was the barber in the village and in the winter my older brother and I used to hold two candlesticks while my father cut hair. When we were youths we used to walk to Coventry City football matches and go to the Hippodrome at night. We used to have fish and chips at Fishy Moore's, have a drink and then go into the Market hall. We used to have a leg of lamb for one shilling, a piece of beef or a load of fish for a shilling – you could have what you could carry after eight o'clock on a Saturday night. This happened until war broke out but a lot of villagers used to go on Saturday night – all these things finished after the First World War.

It was during those years the motor cycles from Triumph Rudge and Coventry Chain used to bring all their new motor bicycles to test them up Stoneleigh Hill and I have seen as many as twenty motorbikes waiting to test them. There was an elder bush growing up the bank on top of the hill and they used to try and ride a bike round it. It was in the middle twenties we used to have an enormous flower show in the field by the Victory hall which used to attract a lot of people and had our own brass band. The last year we had the show it was held half way between Coventry and Stoneleigh. The horse chestnut on the village green and the lime tree on the other green were planted on King Edward the Seventh's Coronation day.

There is one day in my life I will never forget: it happened soon after the first war. My father was taken ill and Mr Lamb, Lord Leigh's farm bailiff asked me if I would drive the Girls' Friendly Society for Miss Cordelia Leigh to the Shire Hall at Warwick. I drove the four wheel to Stoneleigh to pick up the girls but just as I arrived it came the worst thunderstorm I have ever witnessed in my whole life. After the storm bated a little Miss Cordelia Leigh phoned to say no-one would be going to Warwick as three men had been struck with lightning and one of them was dead, and when I got back to the Abbey the village policeman asked me would I please turn and take his corpse back to Stoneleigh where he lived. The thunder and lightning kept on all day till after midnight. When I got back Miss Leigh asked if I would take the Ashow girls only. It continued pouring with rain, thunder and lightning. Eventually I got that soaked I put up at the hotel. Then after a break I had to pick up at seven thirty, still pouring with rain I drove to the Shire Hall. The storm had been on from midday and when we got back Mr Frank Lees out of the Estate Office

took me into the Club and gave me refreshments. By then I could not keep a limb still and he asked one of the estate employees to go back and put the horse in the paddocks, and then I ran home to Stoneleigh arriving home at ten o'clock at night. It was a storm I will never forget in my living memory, but it was not too much for a lady like Miss Cordelia Leigh. For a good many years I used to be frightened out of my life when a storm came – I knew for two or three hours before it came.

Mr Worrall's mother was midwife for the village, she was a dear old lady and everybody respected her. She was like a nurse, and all the doctors used to leave it to Mrs Worrall. I would like to say I was born in Stoneleigh Village on July the eighteenth 1897 and I started school on my third birthday and left school on my thirteenth birthday. My mother and ancestors all worked on the Stoneleigh estate for many generations but my father was born on the Baginton estate. I remember when in my early youth two young men were advised to go abroad for their health's sake. One, Archie Walton, went to America, the other one, James Rensch, went to Canada and after several years he returned and lived in Meriden near Coventry, but Archie Walton failed to survive.

There was one family who used to live at Westwood Heath on Lord Leigh's estate till it was sold to Coventry Corporation, who moved down to the village. He was the estate rough carpenter whose name was George Hancox. He came down to the village straight after the First World War and retired when he was seventy six. His three sons used to be in the Church Lads Brigade but sorry to say the whole family have departed. There is one thing I would like to say about Mr George Hancox, he used to sit down on a box or a chair and he used to say to the children "Can you do this?" and my children will tell you, he used to pull his slipper off his foot and put his toes in his mouth without any effort – it was marvellous. I don't know anyone else who could do it. A grand old man.

During the time I was social secretary of the Stoneleigh Village Club we used to run whist drives in the village club at sixpence each and we used to average twelve to fourteen tables every week. We did this every week until the Second World War broke out. We used to play Westwood Heath Club,

Leek Wootton Club and Ashow Village Club at darts, bagatelle, dominoes and cribbage in the winter months.

It was during the thirties the electric light was brought into the village and Coventry water Supply was brought in during the late thirties. I still kept our pump for drinking water into the fifties. During the two years before the second war the Specials were busy watching for people setting fire to hayricks. Eventually one fell into our hands, PC Selwyn and myself at the back of Glasshouse Wood. When we weren't watching we were going round the Baginton factory

where the Whitley bombers were being made. When war broke out I went to work at Baginton on maintenance work digging underground shelters and camouflaging the factory from the air, and in the evening I was on duty on the main road. When they dropped a bomb in the country it was our job to find where the bomb had dropped.

I must tell you about Mr W. Thomas who used to be the night watchman around Stoneleigh Abbey. He had a dog and nobody dare go near him. Mr Thomas was section leader in the fire service and Thomas and myself broke all records in climbing the fire ladder to the top of Stoneleigh Abbey and connecting a hose pipe ready to use, and the late Lord Leigh had a record....in a glass frame to commemorate it. It was at that time Lord Leigh had two lovely fire engines, a very big steamer and a small coffee pot. The small one was used for farm fires of which there were quite a few and we used to have practice with the big one every other week on a Tuesday. At that time every foreman was employed on the estate but during the end of the twenties quite a few were given permission to get jobs outside the estate because his lordship had to cut down expenses on the estate. It was during the twenties Lord Leigh had electric light brought into the Abbey from Warwick via Ashow.

At the beginning of the Second World War my youngest son volunteered at seventeen and a half. He was one who was specially trained for the D day landings all round the coast. He was very lucky until they reached Belgium but one of the officers found him in a terrible state of mind and I'm sorry to say he still feels much of it and today he gets very depressed. My other son

volunteered but they would not let him join up because he worked for A.W.A and three days before peace was signed he had his papers come to join the forces for two years. Well, when war broke out I worked seven days a week and when the sirens went we used to go out on police duty till the all clear went and all the villagers were busy making a big air raid shelter under the arches under the bridge on the main Coventry to Leamington road. A lot of people helped to make it and when the bombers came over we used to have lots of Coventry people come out and stay till the all clear sounded.

On the fourteenth of November 1940 the night when none of us who remember will ever forget how anyone living in Coventry came out alive we'll never know A continuous bombardment for full twelve hours non-stop – it was as light as day. I was on duty in the middle of Stoneleigh Village and bombers came overhead. They made a right hand turn for the east coast, the guns stationed around us got that hot they had to stop firing. I had to go into Coventry with one of the police officers next morning. We had a job to get through to Cross Cheaping, we were surprised really, there were not so many people as we expected had been killed on the streets.

Stoneleigh Village Club was opened in November 1856 by the Right Hon Lord Leigh as Stoneleigh Village Club and Reading Room and Library and they used to sell cups of coffee and cocoa and later on the members used to be allowed to purchase two pints of beer or two bottles of stout but it was not allowed to sell any spirits or wine. When the public house was made an outdoor beer house the members were allowed to buy three pints of beer for members only but must not open on Sunday. Villagers used to walk to Bubbenhall or Kenilworth, it was not till after the first world war about 1928 that the club was allowed to open after church at eight o'clock – no midday opening till 1930 and then from twelve till two o'clock. Anyone wishing to join the club had to fill in a form by the proposer and the seconder but you could not purchase anything until you had been accepted by a full committee of which three of them were nominated by Lord Leigh himself and they were only allowed to have 10 members outside the village and the subscription was two shillings per annum. This was due first week in November each year. The first steward to be appointed was one of Lord Leigh's firemen as a part-time job after damaging his arm in a farm fire. When Lord Leigh's sons were

born they were presented with a silver bowl given by the members of the Stoneleigh Working Men's Club.

In my early days the club was run by Mr W Wells who acted as secretary and treasurer. He used to be informing Lord Leigh of all that went on and often sent a balance sheet to him. Of course as times changed an agreement was made. There was a large girder brought into the club and built to carry the roof of the club, and on one side of the girder it was painted Friendship Love and Truth and on the other side it was Faith Hope and Charity. The girder was hauled up from the old mill by the weir at the flood gates in the late eighteen hundreds and Lord Leigh says Stoneleigh School was opened a hundred years ago by his ancestors. He told us when the school first opened the villagers called a meeting of all parents and demanded a school should be built in Stoneleigh and after a lengthy meeting the Leigh family agreed to have a school built and all children living in the hamlets around the village should come to the school, including the Kennels, Pypes Mill, Stareton and Finham. When I went to school the average attendance was one hundred and twenty eight.

We used to have a village Co-Operative Society. The first I remember they used to sell everything and bake their own bread and kill their own meat. The first manager was Mr Tom Hewitt and then a man the name of Joe Morris, a shepherd from Mr Metters took it over with one of his sons Harry Morris. They had a big horse and van and they used to deliver all round Stareton, Baginton, Ashow and Stoneleigh Village. They used to have a committee meeting every week and they had checks made of time and they used to pay a dividend every six months according to what checks you handed in. It went very well until the end of the first world war finished and then it began to drop off and by 1928 or 9 the Coventry Co-Op Society took it over lock stock and barrel until they closed the shop and came round with a van for a short while and then packed up altogether. Old Joe Morris used to bake our Sunday dinner in the Co-Operative oven. We used to take batter in a tin and tray to put the pudding in and a stand to put the meat on top of the pudding, and sometimes our mother used to send a cake and a bread pudding in a big square tin. He used to charge 3d for each item and we had to be there at 12.30 prompt and he did this for years. His son Morris used to help him and

for a good many years Harry Morris used to kill pigs in the village and then the village club committee asked him to take over the steward's job; he was a wonderful steward and was very well liked.

In olden days we used to make our own enjoyment and the first wireless I heard was six months after I got married and that was a cat's whisker and headphones. The first wireless I had was in 1928, an American set which cost me eight pounds. At that time we used to have whist drives and dances every week in the Victory Hall and at Christmas time we had twenty four or five tables at whist playing in both rooms and the room used to be packed for dancing. The only night for young ones was Saturday night to the Hippodrome at Coventry, or the Opera House, or when we played football away from home. We had a first class side in the Warwick and District league which we won several times.

The Coventry Golf Club was made about 1912. It used to be grassed by Mr Richard Hollick of Styvechale Road Coventry and Mr Thomas Burbury used to run the Crewe Farm as a market garden. He used to run two lorries into Coventry every day and they used to walk into Coventry and then they used to get a lift back to Stoneleigh. Mr Wright used to run the Home Farm Ashow and he was also manager of the Hippodrome Coventry. We had a big hand bell team in the village. They used to go to Westwood Heath every Boxing Day and all round the farms right up to where the Standard Motor Company stands. That was where Stoneleigh Parish used to go before it was sold by Lord Leigh. In the thirties the Parish Council used to go there to walk the public footpaths.

There used to be twenty one water pumps in the village until Coventry laid the mains into the village and it used to be four or five houses to a pump but the water was lovely to drink. The pump outside my door used to supply water to five houses. My pump was the last to be taken away – Lord Leigh gave permission for it to stay and we had to pay for it to be repaired. The mains were laid after the Second World War. The Spring at Bubbenhall kept our Stoneleigh fire engine going when they had a hayrick on fire by the Three Horseshoes Public House, and it still runs the same today. That's where the houses in Bubbenhall used to get their drinking water from and the people

used to bring bottles and jars to take the water home. We used to walk up to Bubbenhall on Sundays for a drink when we only had a six day licence.

I remember before the First World War....used to come over in droves to theWood to roost and come over again in their hundreds at daybreak and return in the evening but when the war broke out the guns frightened them and they have never come back. The sky was really full.

The present Lord Leigh was a nephew of the late Francis Dudley Lord Leigh. He gave everybody who joined the Forces in the First World War a gold sovereign and a guarantee of their job back, when the war was finished. He had two lovely sisters and they used to come into the school regularly especially Miss Cordelia and she used to have a Bible Class for all the youths from Stoneleigh and Ashow. In the summer we used to have it on Sunday afternoons in the summer house and in the winter we had it in the Abbey. She used to ride a tricycle from Leamington to Stoneleigh every week, wet or fine. She was loved by everybody.

Lord Leigh married an American lady very late in life, he was very fond of watching the game of cricket which was played at the front of Stoneleigh Abbey. Quite a lot of the Staff used to play including the Estate Agent. I am pleased to say our present Lord Leigh still allows the cricket to play there.

I often think of the time he used to have his army down at Chesford and he used to invite the police into the camp. We used to have a lovely time, and often we used to have a second invitation – they were in the good old days.

I also remember when I was in Standard Four I made a saying which I still remember today about our school master Mr Wells. It went like this:

Mr Wells is a very good man
He tries to learn us all he can
Writing reading arithmetic
But he doesn't forget to give us the stick
He makes us dance into France and Spain
Over the hills and back again.

I was surprised when he read it he simply said “Well done, that was very good” and he hung it upon the landing at the top of the stairs at school for anyone to see.

There was another thing he learnt us:

January brings the snow
Makes our feet and fingers glow.
February brings the rain
Thaws the frozen lakes again.
March brings breezes sharp and shrill
Stirs the dancing daffodil.
April brings the primrose sweet
Scatters daisies at our feet.
May brings flocks of pretty lambs
Skipping by their fleecy dams.
June brings tulips, lilies, roses,
Fills the children’s hands with posies.
Hot July brings cooling showers
Apricots and gilly-flowers.
August brings the sheaves of corn
Then the harvest home is born.
Warm September brings the fruit
Sportsmen then begin to shoot
Fresh October brings the pheasant
Then to gather nuts is pleasant
Dull November brings the blast
Hark, the leaves are whirling past
Chill December brings the sleet
Blazing fire and Christmas treat.

I remember when I was a boy my father and mother used to take us for a walk across the fields to do his job as estate shepherd, and he had a marvellous dog called Prince. He used to go over the new bridge and say “Fetch them cows and leave the sheep alone” and after father had inspected the cows he used to say “Let the cows go” and then he used to say “Go over the bridge and fetch them sheep over the bridge” and after that he used to inspect the

sheep and then the dog used to keep looking at my father sitting on the iron railing and father would say “All right Prince, all right, you can go and fetch your bones now, go and fetch your bones” and he used to go down to the front of Stoneleigh Abbey and Miss Cordelia Leigh and Miss Agnes Leigh would be waiting with a small parcel of bones for him. They made a fuss of him and then he would take the parcel back to my father for him to open. He was 18 years old when he died – he was poisoned. Miss Leigh paid for the post-mortem. My father used to train the farmers’ dogs round the area, he used to chain the puppies to poor old Prince to make them go where he wanted. We were not allowed to touch the puppies.

My father died with sugar diabetes at forty-eight years old. My father and mother were both good to people who fell sick. They used to visit them and if they couldn’t my father used to take my elder brothers and I to dig and plant their gardens and if it was a woman my mother used to do the cleaning and cooking and even walk to Kenilworth to fetch medicine. She often used to cook food and take it to the sick.