

Stoneleigh History Society

Minutes of the meeting held on the 27th of January 2026 at Stoneleigh Village Hall 7.30 pm.

1. Sheila welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were 21 members present and five guests. Apologies were received from Pam Baker, Sue Line, Jill Kashi, Clare Burdett, Pete James, Clive and Gill Watson.
2. Notices: a. The rearranged visit to Ragley Hall will take place tomorrow – 5 members will be attending. Also there are many good talks and trips available through the WLHS. b. Mel will be exhibiting some of her artwork at The Herbert and she will also be giving her talk on Stoneleigh Abbey at the Kenilworth History Group. C. Sheila has produced a booklet based on her recent talk to the SHS on 'Stoneleigh, Sugar and Slavery' – price £3. D. Lisa has been doing a lot of work on the SHS website, assisted by Rob. She is in the process of producing booklets based on recent events and displays. Details of how to obtain copies shown below. E. After a recent talk on Henry Parkes at Kenilworth Golf Club Sheila received a letter from a member of the audience. The lady has a brother living in Parkes, Australia and the letter detailed annual events taking place in the town.
3. Sheila introduced the first Speaker for the evening:

Adrian Clarke SHS member on *Fred Lanchester 1868 – 1946*

Adrian gave the background to Fred's early life – His parents were middle class professionals and he and his siblings were notable achievers. Fred was gifted in maths and science; he attended the Hartly Institute which in later years became Southampton University. He also attended an institution in London which later became Imperial College. Unfortunately Fred failed the final year of his degree and left unqualified. He gained employment as a draughtsman in a patent office, but tired of this and found employment in Birmingham at the 'Forward Gas Engine Company'.

So began a long period of inventions and patents. He became interested in flight, and his 'Theory of Flight' was one of his biggest claims to fame. His next interest was the petrol engine motor car. He visited the Paris Exhibition and saw the early Daimlers and Mercedes Benz.

Fred founded the Lanchester Engine Company and designed and built the first all British 4 wheel petrol engine motor car called the *Lanchester Stanhope Phaeton*. He produced his second car in 1897 called the *Gold Medal Phaeton*. This is now in the Science Museum in London.

He turned his attention to the theory of flight and his 'Vortex Theory of flight' was groundbreaking.

However, the Lanchester Motor company ran into financial difficulties in 1905 and eventually the company was bought under somewhat dubious circumstances by Daimler. In the meantime Fred became an engineering consultant and being a patriot, after Bleriot's flight across the Channel, he began to be concerned at Britain's exposure to attacks from the air. In 1916 he published "Aircraft in Warfare".

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At the end of the First World War Fred retired from public life and turned his attention to his hobby of gardening. Here he couldn't help being inventive and came up with an alternative wheelbarrow.

In his final years he suffered from poor health and died in 1946.

He received many honours over his lifetime, including an Honorary Degree from Birmingham University. The Lanchester Polytechnic was named after him and its modern day equivalent Coventry University has a Lanchester archive. The Lanchester Trust also endeavours to keep Fred's achievements alive.

Sheila introduced the second speaker Nora Blagburn. Her talk was on the campaign to stop commercial flights at Coventry Airport (2004 – 2008)

After inviting us all to have a sweet! Nora gave a short introduction to the topic, outlining how the residents of villages surrounding the airport and affected by large passenger jets flying day and night from Coventry airport fought to prevent permanent buildings being erected at the site. She brought boxes of files containing cuttings from local and national newspapers and photographs, many of which were taken by her late husband Will.

Nora also showed us a video which was made at the time and showed the community marching in Baginton, demonstrating at the old garage in Stoneleigh, an art session for the children to paint posters and themselves! and attending Leamington Town Hall where the public enquiries were held.

Her final shots were of the party held in her garden to celebrate planning permission being finally refused and the eventual withdrawal of Thomson flights from the airport.

A victory for community action and a place in history as having caused the longest public enquiry in English history!!

Well done Nora! A contribution by the oldest member to have given a presentation in the SHS programme.

4. Sheila thanked Adrian and Nora for their presentations and the meeting adjourned for refreshments provided by Sarah and Lisa. Thanks to them.
5. The next meeting will be on the 24th of February. It will only be a double bill instead of the triple, as advertised. Maggie will talk on 'Coventry Whitefriars – from religious foundation to workhouse' and Sue will talk about 'The brass band conductor and his defiant daughter!'

N.B. From Lisa:

Wire bound A4 booklet of the VE Show May 2025 - £15

A4 booklet of 1,000 years of Stoneleigh September 2021- £5

Contact Lisa on info@stoneleighhistorysociety.org.uk by Monday 16 February to preorder who will contact you regarding payment. Booklets should be available at our February meeting.