

Stoneleigh History Society

Minutes of the meeting held on the 22nd of September 2026 at 7.30 pm
in Stoneleigh Village Hall

1. Apologies: Pam Baker, Maggie Moorhouse, Barry Nutter, Pam Long, Sue Line, Chris Titley and Sarah Ballinger There were 21 members present and 1 visitor.

2. Notices:

- Sheila welcomed members and visitors to the meeting.
- Douglas has organised a quiz to raise money for the World Scout Jamboree in Poland in 2027. A large no. of scouts from the UK will be attending so lots of money needs to be raised. Quiz - 27th Sept at 2 pm Fishponds Road, Kenilworth
- SMVC will be giving a concert on the 17th of October at Stoneleigh Church. Joining them will be Good Vibrations Community Choir. Tickets £15 , to include refreshments, from Phil Jones. Proceeds to Stoneleigh and Ashow churches.
- Thanks to those who attended the Museum at Marton. Ideas for trips in 2027 welcome.
- Continuing research – Sue Crofts, Pete James, Lisa Reay and Sheila Woolf. Sheila has completed a project begun in David Vaughan's time. A pamphlet costing £3 is now available entitled ' The Stoneleigh Scandal' – a review of the Leigh Peerage Case. Pete has also produced a small pamphlet on the history of Forestry on the Stoneleigh Estate. Interesting to see how much timber sales added to the coffers.
- Lisa and Rob continue to improve and refine the SHS web site. A new section is now open for individual recollections of Stoneleigh.
- The Coventry Society are organising a Heritage Day on the 17th of October at the Herbert. A programme of speakers has been drawn up which should spark keen interest.

3. Sheila introduced Douglas Faulconbridge our speaker for the evening. Douglas is a very active Stoneleigh resident. Since childhood he has been involved in the Scout movement and devotes much of his time to it today, locally and nationally. He mows the grass in the churchyard, was the driver behind the planting of hundreds of daffodils in the churchyard last year and has organised another daffodil planting session in the churchyard this month. Volunteers welcome!

She invited him to begin his talk entitled '**The river Sowe – 64 years from source to mouth.**'

The start of the river Sowe can be traced to Delamere Road, in Bedworth. It meanders through areas of north and south-east Coventry until it reaches Sowe mouth and is absorbed into the river Avon near the Stoneleigh Show Ground.

Douglas started his life close to the start of the Sowe at Foleshill Mill. He was born in 1961 at Mill House next to the Mill. The Faulconbridge family had lived and worked at the Mill for three generations, through his great grandfather Isaac, his grandfather Fred and finally his father also called Fred.

Douglas showed images of his family working at the mill and also of himself and his parents. His mother came from the Isle of Man which is why he was called Douglas. Being corn merchants and having a number of animals to look after was hard work but clearly the generations had gained great satisfaction from their time there. Douglas and his father spent time fishing and being on the river in a punt.

Douglas attended the local primary school and Foxford Comprehensive School, often getting involved with cleaning debris from the river.

After Douglas's father died in 1978 he and his mother tried to carry on but eventually it became too much, and the mill was sold and Douglas and his mother moved out.

Douglas then described places of interest along the river as it wound its way south, such as the nature reserve at Wyken Slough, the Sowe Valley footpath which runs from Hawkesbury Junction to Stoneleigh, the beautiful St Mary Magdalene church at Wyken Croft and the sites of the former mills on the banks of the Sowe at Henley, Walsgrave, Binley and Baginton where the Old Mill Hotel can be found today.

As the river travelled southwards it competed with road and rail networks that were being developed. The Sowe viaduct was created, designed by Robert, the son of George Stephenson. It later joined the Sherbourne, Coventry's more famous river and then moved on joining with Finham Brook and finally arriving at the weir near the village of Stoneleigh and the fish passes that have recently been created.

Douglas had a great number of slides that recorded all the exploration that he had recently undertaken to physically trace the river's journey from Windmill Road to Sowe mouth.

He explained that some shots had been difficult to take and he had stinging nettle rashes to prove it!

Finally Douglas explained his personal link with Stoneleigh. He discovered that through a female member of his family he was related to Sir Henry Parkes. The maiden name of Henry Parkes' mother was Faulconbridge and there is a town in New South Wales called Faulconbridge which clearly Parkes named after her.

It seemed fitting that Douglas and his wife should move to live in Stoneleigh which they did in 2020.

In the discussion that followed Douglas's presentation audience members who had grown up in areas near the Sowe shared their recollections.

4. Sheila brought the meeting to a close. She thanked Phil and Kate for providing refreshments and reminded those present that the next meeting will be on the 27th of October. Jill Kashi, another of our SHS members will be presenting her research on **Mary Dormer Harris** who grew up at Dale House Farm.
5. After refreshments the meeting closed at 9.15 pm.