Stoneleigh History Society

Minutes of the meeting held on the 27th of October 2026 at 7.30 pm in Stoneleigh Village Hall

1. Apologies: Pam Baker, Sue Line, Chris Titley, Shirley Ball, Celia Baly, Margaret Brown, Phil Jones and Mel Bianco. There were 21 members present and 6 visitors.
2. Notices:
    - Sue gave an update on the Christmas Social preparations. She and Sarah are planning to do a similar arrangement as last year. There will be the Quiz first, set this year by Sheila, then food and drink, ending with a general milling about. Food will be obtained from M&S as this proved popular last year, wine, beer and soft drinks will also be provided. The cost will be £5 per person. Names and money to Sarah please, either at the next meeting or by email and BACS. Ref. SHS XMAS. The winning team will receive a crisp £5 note each !
    - Owing to a friend having to withdraw, Sheila has a ticket for Middlemarch at the RSC. There will be no cost. Please see Sheila at the interval.
    - In order to raise funds for Myton Hospice Sheila will be reading the complete works of Jane Austen in 6 x 6-hour sessions in the Leigh Chapel from November the 3rd. (See flyer attached for details)
    - Sheila thanked all members who have kindly given presentations during 2026. This has not only helped to conserve SHS funds but has also demonstrated the goodwill and skills amongst members.
    - Finally, Sheila reminded everyone about the Speaker for the November meeting, Trevor Langley will be enlightening us with 'Tales from the Lobby of the Warwick Arms Hotel'.
3. Sheila introduced Jill Kashi, our speaker for the evening. Her subject was **' Mary Dormer Harris 1867 – 1936'**

    Mary is known primarily as a novelist, but she was also a campaigner for women's rights, a teacher, heritage campaigner, a pacifist, a playwright and occasional actress.

    She spent her early years at Dale House Farm where her father farmed a substantial amount of land. She was educated privately at Miss Blair's School in Kenilworth.
    She experienced the loss of her only sibling, a brother, in 1873 and then the death of her father in 1882. For the remainder of her life Mary and her mother shared the same residence after the farm was too much for the pair to manage.

    Mary went to Lady Margaret Hall at Oxford but although she gained sufficiently high marks to be awarded a First Class Degree, she never received one due to the ban on women in Higher Education. This personal experience of discrimination influenced her future work.
    After her studies she worked on the Oxford English Dictionary, was vice president of the Worker's Educational Association and taught at Birmingham University.
    Mary and her mother settled in Leamington, firstly in Clarendon Street and then in Gaveston Avenue.
    Mary became very involved in Coventry's Heritage, transcribing the 'Coventry Leet Book,' writing 'The Story of Coventry 'in 1911 and in 1914 was a founding member of the 'City of Coventry Guild '.

In 1924 she produced 'Some Manors, Churches and villages of Warwickshire'. This was a well-received publication, and Jill read some extracts from the book concerning Stoneleigh. They demonstrated Mary's keen observational skills and her love for Stoneleigh.

As well as her writing Mary put her energies into pursuing social justice. She joined the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in 1891. In 1913 she was a steward at the Pilgrim's March in Warwick and in the 1930s she joined the Labour Party and the League of Nations.

In 1923 Mary's mother died and after that Mary started to write more plays and essays. She was interested in medieval drama, in particular the 'Stoneleigh Mummers Play' which she was responsible for documenting. In 1933 she wrote 'The Waters of Forgetfulness' which was produced at the Loft Theatre in Leamington to great acclaim. She seemed to be at the height of her powers when she was killed in a tragic traffic accident in Leamington in 1936.

Mary had a glowing obituary in the Coventry Evening Telegraph and later that year there was a display of her work at the John Gulson Reference Library. Two years later a Memorial bursary was set up in her name.

In 2002 Jean Field produced what has become the standard textbook – '*Mary Dormer Harris: The Life and Works of a Warwickshire Historian*'.

Jill completed her presentation by welcoming the audience to examine the books she had brought along, having referred to them in her presentation.

Sheila thanked Jill for a very interesting presentation and invited comments from the audience.

4. Sheila brought the meeting to a close. She reminded those present that the next meeting will be on the 24th of November.
5. After refreshments, kindly provided by Sarah and Kate, the meeting closed at 9.05 pm.

And Now For Something Completely Different!

Supporting the Myton Hospice Bed Appeal

Why?

Funds are needed to open more Hospice Beds for those in need in Coventry and Warwickshire

What's happening?

Sheila Woolf reads aloud the complete works of Jane Austen!

When?

Each Tuesday from November 3rd, until Tuesday December 8th, from 9am till 3pm – six hours each Tuesday for six weeks, totalling 36 hours.

Where?

In the Leigh Chapel of Stoneleigh Church, CV8 3DN

How Can I help?

Donate via www.justgiving.com/page/sheila-woolf-2

Visitors are welcome to come and listen... or you could always pay NOT to listen!

Thank you

01926 492 518
www.mytonhospice.org
@MytonHospices

In aid of myton hospice