

## Stoneleigh History Society AGM Tuesday 29 March 2022

### Chairman's report

A chequer-board year! Lockdowns seemed to come and go, and just as we felt that the worst was over, the pandemic sprang another surprise with "the Omicron variant", rendering our Christmas Social redundant and our January 2022 meeting reduced to a Zoom.

We have kept going, however. It was after all our tenth anniversary year, and although we were unable to celebrate as we might have wished, the occasion was well and truly marked. Our membership has remained loyal, though we have lost a few owing to removal from the village and/or unwillingness to utilise Zoom. Nevertheless we have attracted new members and currently have 39 members and 1 honorary member. Sadly Pam Baker decided to step down from the committee, and we thank her in particular for the extraordinary displays she has created as well as her forensic researches. We are delighted that Clare Clarke has agreed to join the committee in her place.

### Display

During a short window in between lockdowns, when the church re-opened, the "History of the School" exhibition, created for display in 2020 in the Leigh Chapel, was mounted. Together with our various research material it remained there throughout the rest of 2021 and will stay *in situ* this year.

### Research and Publications

Several members have continued to further their research, utilising lockdowns as far as possible, though record offices were mostly inaccessible. Sheila Woolf published a history of the stained glass at Stoneleigh Abbey, a topic hitherto unexplored. Peter James has had several articles published in the newsletter of the Coventry Society, one of which, on Malcolm Pridmore, detailed his family's connections to Stoneleigh, where they are buried. Enquiries about family history still arrive via our website, often adding to our knowledge, and we have been able to help a great many people in different parts of the world uncover their family stories.

A local detectorist, Chris Matthews, has continued to explore our fields and has unearthed some fascinating finds, which he has generously given to the Society. These will be on display at our AGM and will thereafter be held securely. We have also received many photographs and ephemera from local people, to add to our collection.

### Meetings

Following our **March** 2021 AGM, held via Zoom, Peter James gave us another of his unusual and fascinating talks, this time on "The Girl Who Invaded America", concerning the founding of the Salvation Army and its roots in Coventry.

In **April** we welcomed the return of Peter Walters, who - again via Zoom - told us about the project called "Coventry Atlas" masterminded by Coventry University, an extensive

interactive website showcasing Coventry's history. His part in the project was to write a great many narratives about important Coventry people of the past.

Concluding a "Coventry trilogy" to coincide with the City of Culture year, in **May** Sheila Woolf gave a Zoom talk on Philip Larkin and his association with the city.

Unfortunately there was no possibility of a trip to Maxstoke Castle, which we had been hoping to take some two years ago, and our speaker for **June** cancelled.

Activities resumed with gusto, however, as preparations began for our September show, "1000 Years of Stoneleigh". This was to be the culmination of celebrations for our tenth anniversary as a society. Twenty SHS members were in the cast; many more were involved in putting the show on, and together with the Stoneleigh Male Voice Choir we held a very successful evening in the church. We were able to raise £1600 for the Mayor of Kenilworth's Charities, £250 for the church and a sizeable amount for our own coffers. The show was expertly filmed by Bill Crofts, our Treasurer's husband.

Only a few days afterwards we held our **September** meeting, the first "live" one of the year. David Morse spoke to us about the Warwickshire Home Guard, telling us all sorts of things hitherto unknown, and bringing weaponry with him! This talk had been postponed from the previous year.

Similarly, in **October**, we welcomed Dr Richard Churchley, in a talk postponed from 2021. He gave us an enlightening and entertaining presentation on "Old Pubs and Lost Hostelryes". It was wonderful to be together again.

We were, happily, able to conclude our year with a live meeting, before Covid restrictions came into force once more. Our **November** meeting was an "Oscars" night, showing the film of the September Show (available on YouTube as "1000 Years of Stoneleigh") and celebrating with cake and fizz. Members dressed in their finest, and those who had participated in the show were each presented with an "Oscar" – in our case a "Unicorn", in a nod to the Leigh family crest. It was a super way to end the year, and also took the place of a Christmas Social.

By the beginning of 2022 Covid was still a problem and so the first meeting of the year was again held via Zoom. Sheila Woolf gave a presentation specifically created for the Society, called "The Art of the Forgotten", on Coventry artists from the last nineteenth/early twentieth centuries whose names are no longer familiar to us.

At last, in **February**, we resumed meetings in the village hall, and were delighted to hear Jill Kashi give the sequel to the Zoom talk she had given a year ago, about the families and household of Baddesley Clinton.

As we continue in 2022 it is with some relief that we retain an enthusiastic and supportive membership. The Chairman thanks everyone, particularly the committee and its officers, for another year of interest in the history of our lovely village.

**Sheila Woolf March 2022**