

Stoneleigh History Society AGM Tuesday March 25th, 2025

Chairman's Report

2024 was another busy and productive year, though perhaps we have been less “in the spotlight” than in previous years. Enquiries from around the world, from those researching their own families’ Stoneleigh connections, still come our way via our website and our Ancestry site. Local groups continue to be interested in hearing talks about our history, and several walking tours of the village and church have taken place. The Chairman was delighted to provide a local primary school child with information about Stoneleigh history for a school project!

This year there was no new exhibition mounted in the Chapel, but we were pleased to have a small showing at the new annual village “Blossom Event” in the Community Orchard. We displayed booklets about our work including our annual programme, together with some of the detectorist finds discovered in the village. We hope to continue reaching out to the community in this and other ways in 2025.

Our membership remains pretty stable and we have welcomed a few new members; at the same time we were sorry to hear of the death of Ian Harrop, whose work with our sister organisation at Westwood had been so valuable; several of our number, too, suffered the loss of dear family members - we extend our sincere sympathies to them all. On a lighter note we congratulate Jill Kashi on her MA in Modern History from the University of Warwick.

Meetings

Early in the year the committee asked the general membership to submit answers to the question “Why are you a member of Stoneleigh History Society?” The answers ranged from pleasure in meeting others with like interests, to hearing interesting talks and doing research themselves. Following this, it was decided that we would spend the majority of our 2025 meetings hearing presentations by members themselves, either on an aspect of local history or their own family stories. We are very much looking forward to this greater “member participation” in our monthly meetings.

After our AGM in **March** 2024 it was a pleasure to welcome Richard Churchley for a return visit. On this occasion he told us about a great number of churches which are dedicated to unusual saints, in a talk entitled “From Edburga to Elvis.” As usual it was a thoroughly entertaining and informative talk.

In **April** we heard from author Vanessa Morgan, retelling some gruesome 19th century stories from her book “Coventry Murders”.

Despite some technical glitches which made his presentation difficult to view, our **May** meeting was a talk by Tim Clark, head guide at St Mary’s Warwick. To celebrate the 900th anniversary of the church Tim had produced a beautifully-illustrated and detailed book, and it was evident that there was little about the church’s history which Tim didn’t know.

June saw a very different theme: Margaret Rushton, friend of our group and a key member of Leamington History Group, spoke to us on “Five Formidable Local Females” – and they certainly were! In her thoroughly researched and enthusiastic talk Margaret introduced us to some real movers and shakers.

After our summer break, in **September** our speaker was SHS member Quentin Compton-Bishop, whose title was “History Unearthed.” Accompanied by members of the Warwickshire Metal Detecting Club Quentin explained the value of their work and brought with him evidence of many local finds. This enlightening evening encouraged us to keep our eyes peeled!

In anticipation of Remembrance we welcomed two of the Friends of the War Memorial Park in Coventry at the end of **October**. After outlining the history of the park and its inception in 1921, they also spoke of the project to commemorate the fallen. It was a poignant evening and inspired us to visit this beautiful park more often.

The Chairman, Sheila Woolf, gave the last of our talks in **November**, on “Stoneleigh, Sugar and Slavery”. Pursuing the surprising involvement of a local family in the earliest ventures into sugar plantations in Barbados, she went on to investigate later local connections with the abolitionist movement.

Our Christmas Social in **December** saw a departure from the usual: Sue Crofts and Sarah Ballinger organised an entertaining quiz followed by refreshments and the whole evening was a great success. Questions were provided by members and we have a sufficient number for a repeat in December 2025!

We began 2025 with a **January** topic far from home, “1816- the year without a summer” given by David Morse, which made us all feel that climatic events are far from unusual, and their social and economic consequences alarming.

Finally, in **February**, we began our sequence of “home-grown” talks with a quartet of contrasting subjects: Shirley Ball on her husband’s experiences on Christmas Island; Peter James on the Earls of Mercia; Maggie Moorhouse on the Garlick family and Lisa Reay on connections between Durham and Stoneleigh.

Other

In commemorating the life of former Stoneleigh man Edward Langley Fardon, we were delighted that the church allowed the installation in the Leigh Chapel of a wonderful replica of the village forge. This had been made in exquisite detail by expert miniature-maker Jeff Mewies. Jeff has made miniature models of many country houses and his work is now much in demand. It is an interesting (though large!) addition to our display area. Then, over many months, plans were put in place to erect a blue plaque to Fardon, honouring in particular his importance in the history of the development of the bicycle. In intemperate weather in December the plaque was unveiled; much of the work which went towards this had been done by SHS member Adrian Clarke whose CAD skills turned a paper design into reality before casting. Adrian was also MD for the day, during which we were proud to celebrate another great Stoneleigh character.

We look forward to further challenges during the remainder of 2025, and especially thank our Treasurer/Secretary Sue Crofts, together with the rest of the Committee; indeed, thanks go to all those who contribute to the work of the Society in so many ways.

Sheila Woolf, February 2025