

Stoneleigh History Society Tuesday 26th November 2013

- Apologies were received from David and Jean Vaughan, Margaret Wallis
- The next meeting will be the Christmas Social at the Club, on Tuesday 17th December at 7.30pm. please let Sheila know if you can bring any food, so that we cater for the right amount of people. Traditionally we have not had a January meeting, but Sheila suggested that there might be an informal gathering in the Club on the last Tuesday in January, so that members might chat about their research over a drink.
- Plans for the 1914-2014 commemorative exhibition were well under way, and Sheila thanked Lisa and Shirley in particular. More information about the men on the roll of honour is still needed and so members were urged to ask around.
- The church had now given the green light for the Parkes memorial and details would be sent to the Diocese for approval. We hope to have the stone ready to unveil on the 200th anniversary of Parkes' baptism in the church, in July 2015. Fund-raising would be necessary, and Sheila suggested a photographic competition during 2014, to create a calendar for 2015 which could be sold.
- On May 9th, 2014, the church will be holding its own commemorative event for 1914-2014 with music by the SMVC and a selection of readings. Sheila felt privileged to have been asked to help and felt that it was going to be an excellent evening for the community – funds raised to go to the church.
- Jane noted that another history-based evening to raise church funds was to be held on March 7th, when John Burton of the George Eliot Fellowship/Bedworth Society would speak about the Diaries of Alison Evans, a relative of George Eliot.

Our speaker, Paul Smith was then introduced. Paul, a keen cricketer living at Stoneleigh Abbey for the past 12 years, was inspired to research into the cricketing careers of members of the Leigh family when he saw an 1842 painting by John Hayter at the abbey, depicting William Henry Lord Leigh as an 18-year-old, together with his younger brother Edward Chandos, aged 8, and their sister Julia, later the wife of Lord Norton. The early date of the picture related to an explosion in popularity in the game, especially at country houses such as Stoneleigh.

Paul explored the relationship between the Leighs, other aristocratic families and the local game, in the 1840s, noting the establishment in 1847 of the Real Tennis Club in Leamington, patronised by William Henry Leigh and his relative Lord Guernsey. A sporting fraternity grew up, interested in cricket, tennis, foxhunting, riding etc.

Edward Chandos Leigh's career was then explained, from his first playing for the Harrow XI 1849-51, through to his Captaincy of that team, and the establishment of the Harlequins Club at Oxford; via an array of fascinating old photographs and documents Paul took us through the family's interest in both cricket and drama (the Old Stagers) and ultimately the fixtures from September 1868 in which the Abbey team played

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Stoneleigh Village; the scorecard was of particular interest! Edward Chandos Leigh's legal career was illustrated together with his presidency of the MCC in 1887 – an important year for that Club, since it celebrated its centenary. He was knighted by King Edward VII in 1901. When he died in 1915 he was buried in Stoneleigh Churchyard, thus sealing the connection with Stoneleigh which had begun when he was born 82 years before, at the Abbey.

Finally, Paul took us through stories of some of the younger members of the family, including the 21st birthday match for Gilbert Henry Chandos Leigh in 1872, before turning to the deaths, in WW1, of Edward Chandos Leigh's two sons, and the subsequent death of Edward Chandos Leigh himself, and his wife and daughter. Paul spoke of the coincidence in his discovering that his own great-grandfather had been killed at Aubers Ridge in the same battle as Edward Henry Leigh, the second son of Edward Chandos Leigh.

To conclude his talk Paul delineated the continuing tradition of cricket played at the abbey, including the Wisden award, in 2003, of the Loveliest Cricket Ground in England.

The meeting closed at 9.20pm.