

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STONELEIGH HISTORY SOCIETY HELD ON 29 SEPTEMBER 2015

Present: 13 members of the SHS plus 3 guests.

Apologies: Sarah Ballinger and Shirley Ball.

Introduction: Sheila Woolf welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Rachel and Pam for organising refreshments. She outlined plans for forthcoming meetings.

October 27 - Pete James on the history of local fulling mills

November 29 - Sheila and David Vaughan on the intricacies of the Leigh Peerage Case

December 15 - Christmas Social in the Village Club

January - The Village Club was organising a series of Quiz Nights, to be hosted by different village organisation. SHS had volunteered for January, details to be circulated later.

February - Avril Newey

March AGM - 'Crime & Punishment' by a speaker from the Warwick Record Office

Information about other 2016 events to be announced later but it was likely that there would be a 'Georgian Choir' event in the Church, possibly on 7 May.

Members of SHS had been busy over the summer. E.g.:

5 July, Parkes event: particular thanks to Margaret Wallis and all who helped in any way. Pam Baker had compiled a 10-minute slide show (shown later in the evening) which included some of the official photographs taken by Tony Swann. Two books and a portrait, given by Ian Thom, were on display at the meeting.

8 August - Sheila and Lisa Reay had attended the Royal Fusiliers event at St. John's Museum, Warwick.

During August a BBC team had spent a lot of time in the village preparing for a programme about English cottages, to be shown on BBC4 next year, to be presented by Dan Cruikshank. One programme would be devoted to Stoneleigh and several villagers had been involved to date - a somewhat demanding experience for those concerned.

September 12 - The Heritage Weekend had been a great success and had attracted many visitors to the Church and village. Thanks to those who helped on the day.

September 19 - Thanks to Lisa for co-ordinating efforts on behalf of SHS when Sheila had been involved with the Warwickshire History Society event at Stoneleigh Abbey that day, at which Michael Wood had been the special guest.

31 October - Members were asked to note that the Autumn Work Party, co-ordinated by SHS member Clive Watson, would be in the churchyard from 9.30 onwards.

Msw/10/15

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Lisa Reay then introduced The Churchyard Project

This project would follow on from the invaluable work undertaken 35 years ago by Stoneleigh WI. Since that date many of the gravestones had deteriorated considerably (sandstone far more than granite ones). Also, the advent of ancestry.co.uk and other family history sites, digital photography and many technical developments meant that tracing was considerably easier, although not without its challenges. An increasing number of visitors to the church had asked Jacquie Cubitt (the Church Administrator) for information about gravestones and it was felt that an updating exercise was long overdue.

Lisa's vision is to have a list of the gravestones with background information on all those named, in much the same way as the WW1 display was constructed. Progress to date was outlined, starting with gravestones in Plot A (nearest the church). The next plot to be tackled would be Plot B (nearest Vicarage Road) with the end of April 2016 being the goal for completion so that an exhibition could be mounted for summer 2016.

Volunteers were sought to help with a variety of tasks e.g.

check and decipher the wording on headstones, photograph them,

check names against the parish register and the relevant census,

check the vicar's diary (invaluable information about where people lived, location of children, family jobs etc.),

research on genealogy websites, information from family members or former neighbours (if still living),

check previous editions of the News for stories about named individuals

visit the local Records Office website

map out graveyard

help tidy the graveyard (31 October)

Members were asked to let Lisa know if they could help in any way. Lisa could then point out any overlap, any sensitive areas (e.g. as far as existing family members were concerned - families might prefer to do their own research), suggest project partners etc.

Derek Robinson who had been helping with photographing the headstones, pointed out that dampened foil film was the best aid for deciphering. On no account should any sort of metal be used.

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Various questions were raised e.g. what would happen about unmarked graves, even if a death was recorded in the Parish Register. This was part of the overall jigsaw the project faced. Derek pointed out that there were a lot of loose stones lying in Plot B in particular. He assumed most of these were from cheaper headstones provided for former almshouse residents whose families probably could not afford a more substantial headstone. It was also important to bear in mind the '100-year rule' – if indeed that covered gravestones as well as printed materials. There was no intention whatsoever that the Churchyard Project would cause any offence or embarrassment to families, but great care would need to be taken to ensure that this did not happen.* Careful co-ordination was therefore essential.

Thanks to Lisa.

* A clarification since the meeting.....If you visit a Record Office any information, e.g. in school logbooks, is prohibited unless you sign a document that states you will not use the document to cause any distress to living relatives of persons. Re: birth / marriage / death certificates and wills, the genealogy sites only show up to the year you are allowed to view online, (currently 20 years) and newspapers that can be viewed at a library which do not appear to have any date restriction as they are in the public domain anyway.