

**Minutes of the Stoneleigh History Society meeting held on the 25th of March 2025 in
Stoneleigh Village Hall 7.45 pm**

1. Sheila began the meeting with notices. a. She has met recently with Phil and Lisa to discuss progress on preparations for the VE commemoration evening. Jane would like help with the refreshments, stewards for the door needed as well as donations for raffle prizes. b. Sheila will be giving a talk at Aylesford Primary School for the WLHS on the 15th Of April at 7.15 for 7.30 pm. The talk is entitled 'Caring for the community – the contribution made by the Leigh family.' As we are affiliates there is no fee. c. WLHS have organised a visit in June (26th) to Arbury Hall where Sheila will give a guided tour.
2. Sheila explained that she had agreed to step in and give her talk in place of the advertised one.

'An Arabian Odyssey – from Flintshire to the land of the Pharaohs'

Sheila said that she had been fascinated from childhood by a very old book referred to as 'Uncle Edward's Diary'. She then went on to recount the circumstances surrounding the diary.

Sheila's great, great, grandfather came from Rhuddlan in North Wales. John Evans had a number of interests; he was a land surveyor and a Bard, regularly attending eisteddfods. He was very active in the community and the local newspaper reported on his activities in one edition in 1861.

He and his wife lived in a small house on the High Street in Rhuddlan and had a very large family.

Some of the female members of the Evans family – Elizabeth, Harriet and Anne - moved to England in search of work. They obtained work 'in service' in Coventry, Kenilworth and Bedworth.

One of John's sons, Edward Baldwin Evans moved to Liverpool and attended the Liverpool Institute. He became a shipping clerk, and this allowed him to travel the world picking up skills and knowledge along the way. He spent some time in Egypt and became fluent in Arabic.

He wrote many letters home to his sisters describing the tension between the European colonial rulers and the Arab leaders in Egypt and Sudan. The British government was anxious to maintain the lifeline to India which had been created by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869.

During a period lasting from 1882 – 89 the British combined with the Egyptians to establish control of the area. The British Naval bombardment of Alexandria in 1882 revealed the seriousness of the situation.

After a crushing defeat at Tell El Kebir by the Egyptian Army the Arab leader Ahmed 'Urabi was captured and Edward called upon to act as translator during 'Urabi's trial.

In one of his letters home Edward expressed a desire to return to the UK but Edward was highly thought of and useful to the British Army because of his knowledge of the local language.

By the end of 1882 the Egyptian government was under British control. However there was concern about unrest in Sudan and so the British advisors to the

Egyptian government gave permission for an expedition to Sudan in order to restore order. Edward was conscripted into the Army and made Captain. Throughout the summer of 1883 forces gathered around Khartoum, eventually reaching 10,000 men plus guns and equipment. The force was under the command of William Hicks a retired Indian Staff Corps Officer and 12 other European officers. The mission was to relieve the siege of the City of El Obeid. They were up against a 'Mahdist' army of up to 40,000 well drilled and well-armed men.

The Egyptian army, under the leadership of Hicks was, according to Winston Churchill "perhaps the worst army that has ever marched to war". They were poorly led and discipline not good. The Battle of El Obeid took place on the 3rd and 4th of November 1883 and was a massacre. The great majority of the Egyptian force was killed, including Edward.

The 'Caernarvon and Denbigh Herald' described the awful events in their November 30th edition of 1883.

In Edward's last letter home he had outlined how his estate should be divided. This letter was made into a will at Browett's in Coventry.

His estate was divided between his sisters with an amount of £20 set aside for a memorial to be erected in St. Mary's Church yard in Rhuddlan.

Among his personal effects were ostrich feathers, a gold watch and a list of the addresses of all his other siblings. Edwards diary and his letters were divided between family members with Sheila's side of the family inheriting the diary.

Sheila wrote a book for the family called 'The Dragon and the Rose'. Due to some dogged research she was able to track all Edwards siblings and ancestors bar one, Edwin.

In January 2024 Sheila received an email from the Rhuddlan History Society. They were writing to let her know that one of their members was to give a talk on Captain Edward Baldwin Evans. They didn't invite Sheila to add anything to the talk and it went ahead with a You Tube video recording of the event.

There have been other recent developments, with Sheila having been contacted by a relative of the 'missing' sibling Edwin. They live in Warwick and Sheila has met with them.

The value of family history research has paid off further by Sheila hearing about another relative who lived in Nuneaton, taught English and Drama and was a guide at Arbury Hall. She also had a daughter called Edith, which was Sheila's mother's name. Such coincidences!!

3. There was break for refreshments and further discussion.
4. The meeting closed at 21.15.

NB Since the meeting Sheila has received enquiries about the Aylesford School talk . Please find attached details of how to get to the talk.

Also if anyone is interested in the Arbury Hall visit they should go directly to the WHLS website.

SMC/25/3/25

DIRECTIONS

Drive through the centre of Warwick (West Street) past the Lord Leycester, on the Stratford Road (A429). Turn right onto Tapping Way and follow the road in a clockwise direction- the school's large car park is on your right and the talk is in the primary school to the right of the main school.

Alternatively you can take the A46 and come back towards Warwick at the Longbridge Island, when Tapping Way will be on your left.