

**Minutes of the Stoneleigh History Society meeting held on the 27th of May 2025
7.30 pm at Stoneleigh Village Hall.**

1. Apologies were received from Quentin Compton-Bishop, Celia Baly, Lisa Reay , Margaret Wallis, Sue Line, Clare and Adrian Clarke, Phil and Kate Jones.
2. Sheila welcomed members and visitors to the meeting – 19 members and 6 visitors.
3. Notices:
Happy Birthday to Henry Parkes!
At the Blossom Festival a number of SHS booklets were sold and members present were able to spread the news about SHS activities.
A message from Lisa, who was unable to attend; the website is becoming much more user friendly, and she is working with Rob Orland to add more features.
Family history research will be much easier in future.
Coventry Rotary Club have suggested to Sheila that next summer a treasure trail around Stoneleigh could take place!
The VE day event raised £1000 which has been split equally between the Church and the British Legion. Sheila thanked the 16 SHS members who had been involved in the event on some way. Sheila read out a letter of thanks received from Elizabeth Penlington.
Finally, Sheila thanked Pam Long and Margaret Davies for organising refreshments.
4. Sheila introduced our speaker for the evening – Mel Bianco. Her topic for the evening –
Stoneleigh Abbey – The Year 1155. 870 years ago.

These are notes taken from a very extensive presentation supported by good quality slides:

No sketches are available of the original Stoneleigh Abbey, but clues from other Cistercian Abbeys and parts of the original can be detected so that, on close inspection it is possible to gain an idea of what it might have been like.

Father Terry from Mount St Bernard Abbey has been a very useful source of information. Mel has found him to be humorous and remarkably in tune with modern trends!

There were 96 Cistercian Abbeys in Britain and during the reigns of Plantagenet, French speaking Kings of England the Cistercians were given land to build Abbeys. They tended to be built in the countryside where farming crops and animals took place using large numbers of lay monks. The Benedictine orders tended to be based in the towns.

Abbeys were built in Kenilworth and Stoneleigh but the Stoneleigh one was probably four times as big.

Through extensive detective work at Stoneleigh Mel has discovered many clues as to how things might have been e.g.

Some of the Cistercian Abbey arches can still be seen but incorporated into a more recent building .

The Chapter House door is still in existence in the courtyard, used as a window. The Parlour or slype archway still exists as does the Choir Monks Day Room. Latrines were usually placed at the end of dormitories, but it is not clear if that was the case at Stoneleigh. It's likely though that the Georgian channel which leads to the river was part of an earlier system.

There are other clues as to the extent and wealth of Stoneleigh Abbey: Outer farms were called Granges, hence Stoneleigh Grange, Cryfield Grange and Milburn Grange to name just three.

The stables would have been where the cricket pitch is today, also a guest house. The infirmary, bakehouse and malt house would have been around there as well. There would have been gardens and fishponds. Using 'Google Earth' these can be detected today.

Mel has produced a site plan and a 3D sketch of what she thinks the whole Abbey site would have looked like. Lots of research undertaken but plenty more to come.

5. Sheila thanked Mel for an excellent presentation and the meeting broke up for refreshments and discussion.
6. The next SHS meeting will be on the 25th of June.