

**NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STONELEIGH HISTORY SOCIETY HELD ON 23
FEBRUARY 2016 IN STONELEIGH VILLAGE HALL**

Present: 32 members of the SHS (including 4 new members) and 3 guests

Apologies: David Brooks, Marianne Puxley, Rob Orland and Jean Vaughan

Introduction: Sheila Woolf welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the year.

Thanks to all members who had renewed their membership already and to new members (Will Blagburn, Janet and David Gibson and Pam Long).

The SHS AGM would be held on 22 March, rather than 29th which is Easter Tuesday. After the AGM there would be a talk on 'Crime and Punishment' by Amanda Williams from the Warwick County Records Office. An agenda and other information would be circulated to members before the meeting.

The April outing originally announced has been postponed. As the Church will be closed for repairs from August 1st for six months, further progress on the Churchyard Project will be unveiled at a meeting on **April 26th**. This will enable the accompanying display to be seen in the church for four months before the church closure. NB this meeting will be held in the church.

At the May 24 meeting David Fry will give a talk on Victorian and Edwardian photographers. NB This meeting will be held a week early as the final Tuesday in May is the one following the Spring Bank Holiday

Details of a **June** meeting (to replace the original topic now brought forward to April) will be advised in due course.

Warwickshire Local History Society's talk on 15 March will be on "The debauched parson and the wit-already-expired-rogue": Warwickshire parish politics 1660-1720. There would also be a presentation to Bob Bearman (retiring after 45 years as Editor of '*Warwickshire History*').

Family Tree Course: Lisa Reay drew members' attention to a free family tree online course which was due to start on 14 March – 4 hours a week over 6 weeks. Fliers were available. She also asked members to collect their laminated membership cards (with a schedule of meetings on the back) and to check their contact details in the Society's records.

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Sheila then welcomed Peter Walters (a well-known local journalist whose latest book was 'The Story of Coventry') to talk about the Restoration of the Earlsdon Fountain, with which SHS members Avril Newey and Pete James had been involved for many years. Pete provided the slides for the presentation.

Peter began by giving a brief history of Earlsdon which was originally an industrial village, well outside Coventry, where land was purchased in 1852 by the Coventry Freehold Land Society to provide 250 building lots for homes, mainly for weavers and watchmakers, the latter predominating after 1860. Initially Earlsdon was unpopular due to problematic drains, but this problem was eventually resolved in 1898 after which

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it became a strongly nonconformist suburb to which more affluent people were attracted as it was close to the centre of Coventry.

Peter then spoke about the likely provenance of the Earlsdon fountain. In 1859 there was a fountain in Spon End provided by the Coventry United Temperance Band of Hope (as with other fountains around the UK – and indeed the world – this was mainly a public health development given a widespread cholera outbreak, although there was a ‘drink water not beer’ underlying message too). This fountain never worked properly and was eventually moved outside St John’s Church but by 1884 had been replaced by a smaller fountain which had a gas lamp on top. It is believed that *this* is *the* Earlsdon Fountain.

The Fountain was put in Earlsdon in 1921, the year Memorial Park was opened, located by The Firs and Earlsdon Avenue (which did not link with the Kenilworth Road until the 1890s). This fountain worked satisfactorily until the 1970s when it fell into disrepair and the restoration campaign began.

Over the next thirty years money was gradually raised from organisation such as the Drinking Fountain Association, Severn Trent, Coventry City Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund. The money eventually raised, in 2015 a company was located in Glossop which could undertake the necessary restoration - The Fountains Company – thefountainscompany.co.uk This company had restored fountains in Jephson Gardens in Leamington and has recently been commissioned to restore fountains found in the gardens of George and Amal Clooney’s recently-purchased house in Sonning, Buckinghamshire.

Restoration includes a new top, new taps, gold leaf, with drinking bowls for dogs at the bottom as well as the human drinking areas. The fountain has been moved slightly away from the road and there is now a clear area around it and shortly there will be an interpretation panel, a bench, and a wildflower meadow. It has already proved popular with local residents and schools. There has been no vandalism to date. The fountain is switched off for the winter but will be turned back on by the end of March - part of ‘the war against the plastic bottle’.

In an article in the Coventry Telegraph it was claimed that the Earlsdon restored drinking fountain was thought to be the only one still working. It is hoped that the fountain can be designated as a listed building. This story is a terrific example of dedication and perseverance.

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After a few questions to Peter, Sheila thanked him on behalf of the SHS. She also thanked Pete James for providing the excellent illustrations and to Avril Newey for having suggested this talk. (N.B. feedback over coffee and afterwards indicated how very popular this talk was).

Thanks also to Pam Baker and Daphne James for serving refreshments.