

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STONELEIGH HISTORY SOCIETY HELD ON 25 OCTOBER 2016

Present: 16 members of the SHS and one guest

Apologies: Sarah Ballinger, Jane Taylor, David and Janet Gibson, Ken Wallis, David Brooks, David and Jean Vaughan, Shirley Ball, Avril Newey and Peter Thompson. Paul Smith sent apologies later.

Welcome: Sheila Woolf welcomed everyone and made two announcements. i) At the November meeting she would give a talk 'Here Come the Girls' about C19th American heiresses who married Warwickshire gentry. This was in place of David Brooks' advertised talk on Stoneleigh agriculture; it was hoped that David would be able to give the talk in 2017. ii) Anyone wishing to attend the event at Stoneleigh Abbey chapel on 18 November commemorating the end of the Battle of the Somme were asked to contact either Sheila or Avril Newey so that numbers were known for refreshment purposes.

Sheila then welcomed **Vic Nock** to give a talk on **Medieval Weaponry**. As 25 October was St Crispin's Day this was a most appropriate date for such a talk. Vic explained that he became interested in archery about 20 years ago. His impressive collection of bows, arrows, and arrowheads, and a crossbow were on display at the meeting and members were amazed at the craftsmanship, size, weight, design etc. of them. The structure of various types of bow was described. Styles varied considerably e.g. American Flat and Mongolian (for use on horseback). Although yew was the wood that was most commonly used, other sources were also used.

Bows can weigh 90-150 lbs and can break easily. The heavier the bow the further arrows can be shot (even as far as 450 yards). There were about 7000 English archers at Agincourt in 1415 compared with 32,000 French so it was a tactical victory. Strings were made from hemp or boiled stinging nettles.

Armies were easy to raise as each lord of the manor had their own archer captains who would train locals from as young as 7 years old, It took 15-20 years to train a proficient archer! Such long training meant that archers knew each other very well, their strengths and weaknesses. As arrows weighed 2-4 lbs each archer had to judge which they could cope with best, and judge the size of his quiver accordingly. Arrows were bow-specific so a great deal of skills was involved. Each arrow would bear a crest and these could be returned to their owners after battle. Often a 'flight' i.e. feathers were attached to the bows.

Vic showed his collection of very varied arrowheads used for hunting and for battle. Some were designed to impart maximum damage and to be difficult to remove. Some could incorporate flammable material which could then be used for shooting over castle walls, for instance.

Fighting with bows and arrows was first recorded 25-50,000 years ago, as seen in cave paintings, Egyptian hieroglyphics etc. A large hoard of bows (137) and arrows (35,000) were found in the wreck of the *Mary Rose* which added greatly to knowledge about this weaponry.

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Various common sayings have their origin in archery e.g. Keeping Tabs (checking where distance notches were placed on the bow), Brace Yourself (get ready for action), A Bolt out of the Blue (a crossbow), 'Several Strings to his Bow'.

The development of cannons saw the end of the use of bows and arrows in warfare.

The British Longbow Society is the main source of information about traditional archery and occasional meetings (for Target and Clout' shooting) are held throughout the UK (and occasionally in the USA). Also see the Wikipedia entry for detailed information.

Vic was thanked for a most interesting talk and for bringing so much equipment to illustrate it.