

NOTES OF THE STONELEIGH HISTORY SOCIETY MEETING HELD ON 26 FEBRUARY 2019

Present: 29 members and 9 guests.

Apologies: Liz Sykes, Lisa Reay, Avril Newey and June Burr.

Welcome: Sheila Woolf welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially a record number of guests.

Announcements:

Beginning next year, there will be a meeting in January

Thanks to Sue Crofts for processing membership renewals, Lisa Reay for preparing membership cards, Shirley Ball for preparing the refreshment rota, and Margaret Wallis for preparing and distributing notices.

The next meeting, on 26 March, would be the AGM, with the speaker Heidi Meyer, Master of the Lord Leycester Hospital, Warwick. Reports will be circulated beforehand. There would be no elections this year.

A query had been received from Heritage Warwickshire about volunteering for a digital project at the county record office. Details available from Sheila if you're interested or from Sarah Hann at bytes@warwickshire.gov.uk.

As previously announced, the visit to the Back to Backs in Birmingham would be on 29 May. So far 12 members had booked. Others were welcome (tell Sheila). Steep stairs would be involved.

Thank you cards had been received following the WW1 event and from Myton Hospice for the donation from calendar sales profits.

Sheila's latest publication – on Jane Austen and Stoneleigh Abbey – was on sale for £3.

Warwick Local History Society journals were available for inspection.

A volunteer was needed to lead a group round the village on May 4 as Sheila would be away then.

Sheila then welcomed the speaker, Stuart Green

Stuart spoke about his father's service during World War Two and his imprisonment in Stalag Luft III POW camp in Poland.

Alan William Green was the eldest son of a Coventry pharmacist. He lived in Stoneleigh until his death in 1976. He was called up in 1940 and selected as a navigator, his colour blindness preventing his becoming a pilot. His air training took place in Canada and he married a Canadian. In July 1941 he flew missions in Fairey Battle and Avro Anson aircraft before a Vickers Wellington to bomb Ostend. Later he flew 22 missions with the RAF's first four-engined huge aircraft, the Stirling, including to Germany, Czech Republic (Skoda factory), Denmark and France. He was shot down twice, including in June 1942 on a mission to Emden when he was recorded as missing in action over Holland. Three of his crew were

killed and five were eventually taken prisoner after being shielded by local people for a time. The five were taken to the Stalag Luft 111 camp in Silesia which was featured in the film 'The Great Escape'. Stuart gave details of life in the camp which included evidence of great ingenuity and resilience by the prisoners (football, theatre productions etc.) but the details of the escape were the most amazing with a huge amount of equipment being smuggled into tunnels. This escape was considered to be the best project management achievement ever undertaken, with 600 men involved. Eventually the camp was evacuated and prisoners undertook 'the Long March' towards Berlin. Alan Green was demobbed in June 1945.

As part of his research, Stuart had visited many of the places his father had been. The most touching of these visits involved the memorial to the three dead crewmen in Holland. A woman who was 16 at the time of the crash had persevered in getting a memorial built. The farmer who had helped rescue the survivors had kept the clips and harness from his father's parachute and these were eventually handed over to him. Stuart said that his father had always suspected that that he and his colleagues had been betrayed by Nazi sympathisers and during his own visits it had become clear that some of the local people had been reluctant to talk about what had happened as some of their families had collaborated with the Nazis over several issues, including this one.

Bomber Command had involved 125,000 crew, 55,573 of whom had died. A memorial in Green Park, London, had been dedicated to them, opened by the Queen in June 2012.

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Sheila thanked Stuart for a most interesting talk. Also thanks to Mel Dearing and Anthony Bianco for providing the refreshments.