

MINUTES OF THE STONELEIGH HISTORY SOCIETY AGM HELD ON 26 MARCH 2019

Welcome: Sheila Woolf welcomed everyone to the 8th AGM of the Society. 32 members of the SHS attended. There were two new members.

Apologies: Margaret and Ken Wallis, Avril Newey, Clive and Gill Watson, Paul Smith and Margaret Moorhouse.

Minutes of the AGM held on 27 March 2018: These were accepted as a correct record.

Matters arising: None

Chairman's Report: This had been circulated previously by Margaret Wallis for which she was thanked by Sheila. As there had been ample opportunity for members to read the report, acceptance of it was proposed by Jane Taylor and seconded by Pam Baker.

Treasurer's Report: A detailed report had been circulated to all members along with the accounts. One question arose concerning the date by which members' renewals were included and the Treasurer explained the apparent anomaly. Acceptance of the report was proposed by Peter James and seconded by Adrian Clarke. The Treasurer was thanked for her work in this matter.

Any Other Business:

1. Refreshment providers were thanked and next month's team alerted.
2. Next month's meeting would be by Derek Clarke, on the restoration of the Back to Back properties in Birmingham.
3. The May trip to these properties had only 13 subscribers so far and more were welcomed. See Sheila.
4. Last month's speaker, Stuart Green, had sent thanks from Bomber Command in Lincoln for our donation following his talk in February; he also sent details of his trip to Stalag Luft III for the 75th anniversary, which had been featured on the News over the weekend.
5. [After the report Nora Blagburn moved a vote of thanks to the Committee for all their work over the past year.]

At the conclusion of the AGM the speaker, Heidi Meyer, Master of the Lord Leycester Hospital in Warwick, was introduced.

Ms Meyer began by stating that the Hospital was the best example of medieval courtyard architecture in England, and had from its inception been renowned for good governance and for providing charity.

She went on to explain a little about her own military background, and that she had served in many war zones. A common factor she had found was a complete breakdown of civil governance. She had decided to find an alternative occupation, and discovered that the LL Hospital had almost 900 years of philanthropic work; she was instantly attracted to it.

Roger de Newburg had built a chapel on the site in 1123, and travellers through Warwick would pray there for a safe onward journey. Thomas Beauchamp the 12th Earl of Warwick later restored it; the Hospital was given to the three combined guilds of St George, the Holy Trinity and the Virgin Mary, in the 14th century. The guilds were very powerful and looked

after consumer standards in the town as well as caring for the needy. They built the great Banqueting Hall and the Guildhall. The building was theirs for nearly 200 years.

All was well until King Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries, which seriously disrupted the charitable life of the country, causing great hardship. The Hospital was threatened with possession by the Crown. However, local man Thomas Oken laid out an argument for saving it – and won. It became an educational establishment, the first Warwick School. During Elizabeth I's reign it became obvious that the condition of the poor was dire, and she set up the first of many Poor Laws. The Hospital then became a place to care for the military and the dying.

Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, decided in 1571 that one of the many ways in which he might impress the Queen would be to show her that he cared for the needy and he therefore appropriated the Hospital. He established accommodation for 12 Brethren.

Today there are 8 Brethren, and the same charitable mission exists as it did years ago. Ms Meyer gave the example of Guardsman John Dawson aged 28, blinded in one eye and wounded in Helmand, who was now a resident. She went on to talk about the money which needed to be raised for essential repair work to the building.

In answer to questions she explained that some Brethren were accompanied by their wives as residents; that the residents do not have to be local to Warwick and that they simply apply. Technically there was no bar to a woman becoming a Brother. She had, however, particularly sought out Guardsman Dawson as she hopes to increase the mix of ages among the Brethren, who have in common their military backgrounds irrespective of age. She spoke about the possibility of members of the public becoming a Friend of the Hospital and about the many other ways in which the organisation raises money – through events, weddings, visitors etc. The Brethren are provided with free accommodation in return for 700 hours per year of contribution to the life of the Hospital. They enjoy being tour guides, working in the ticket office etc. Every morning at 9.30 the Brethren and Master meet for prayers.

At the end of her presentation a vote of thanks was given by Anthony Bianco who stressed the vital importance of a variety of organisations which helped veterans of all ages.

The formal business of the meeting closed at 8.50pm after which refreshments were served and members mingled until 9.20pm.

Minutes: SLW 28/3/19