

NOTES OF THE MEEETING OF THE STONELEIGH HISTORY SOCIETY HELD ON 30 APRIL 2019

Present: 26 SHS members

Apologies: Avril Newey, Susie Thompson, Claire Harvey-Smith

Welcome: Sheila Woolf welcomed everyone to the meeting. Pete James was thanked profusely for having agreed to give his talk this evening instead of in June when Derek Clarke, who was currently indisposed, would give his talk on the Birmingham Back-to-Backs.

The SHS visit to the Back-to-Backs would take place on Wednesday 29 May. 19 places had been booked so there was one vacancy. The fee for non-National Trust members would be £9 a head. Tours would take place at 1.45, 2 and 2.15. Each tour would last approx. 1 ½ hours. Sheila would draw up a list of group members and circulate later. Participants needed to be aware that there are 8 flights of stairs.

Sheila reported that she had been approached by the family of William Roseblade, a C19 watercolourist who had painted several scenes in Stoneleigh and is buried in the churchyard.

Subsequently, the SHS had been given 16 paintings and it was proposed that these become the SHS exhibition in the Leigh Chapel during the forthcoming Duck Race and Heritage Weekend. The Committee would meet shortly to decide about issues such as insurance, storage, mounting etc.

Pete James: The Coventry Peace Riots of 1919

Pete's interest in these events stemmed from discovering the records of his grandfather who was a policeman in Coventry in which there was a reference to 'payments for extra duties in the city from 19-27 July 1919'. His talk was illustrated by numerous photographs and press cutting from the time.

At the end of World War I it had been generally agreed that celebratory events should be held on the same day throughout the country. It was the responsibility of local councils to decide on the nature of these events. Coventry decided on a service in the cathedral followed by a pageant/procession involving Lady Godiva (the daughter of a councillor), local school children, councillors dressed as 150 historical figures. Ex-servicemen were given very minor roles and there was no place at all for the numerous factory workers who had played such a crucial service on the home front). The prominent role of councillors and eminent local people was unpopular. The procession lasted a mere 11 minutes! Crowds lined the streets and beds were brought out of Coventry Hospital so that patients could witness the event. Various events were planned for the evening, including a hog roast and fireworks, but it rained and these were cancelled, much to the annoyance of a large crowd that had gathered in Broadgate. Three days of rioting ensued, involving c7000 rioters. Shops and cafes/pubs were targeted and there was a lot of looting. The local police, with reinforcements from other parts of the region, attempted to restore order. Over the three days 100 people were injured. Few arrests were made, apart from looters.

Subsequently there was considerable angst about why and how the riots had happened, not only in Coventry but, for example, in Luton (where soldiers had also been excluded from

events) and there were strikes in Glasgow and Liverpool. ‘Outsiders’ and ex-servicemen bore the brunt of the blame but in retrospect it was begrudgingly acknowledged that councillors’ decision to plan an event in which they rather than ex-servicemen and factory-workers took major roles was tactless and inappropriate. The latter point is telling as when Pete visited the Coventry archives he was denied access to certain information and the archivist commented that these events were not something that Coventry City was proud about!

N.B. The Stoneleigh & Ashow peace procession was postponed until August 20019 as the Leigh family wanted to attend the event in London. Unlike the event in Coventry, the London event was peaceful and involved many servicemen, including some from ‘The Empire’.

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Sheila thanked Pete for a fascinating talk about a little-known episode in local history. Also thanks to Maggie Moorhouse and Jane Taylor for providing the refreshments.