

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

Present: 21 members of the SHS

Apologies: Maggie Moorhouse, Avril Newey Adrian and Clare Clarke and Ken Wallis.

Welcome: Sheila Woolf welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were a few items to report:

The five members who had gone on the visit to the Shakespeare Trust archives reported that it was an excellent event.

There was to be a conference on 16 May 2020 celebrating the centenary of the Dugdale Society. Details attached. **Applications should be received by the end of March; if interested, members of SHS should make an individual application (no need to do it via Sheila).**

This was the last talk of the year. The Christmas Social would be held at 7.30 pm on Tuesday 17 December. Drinks would be provided. Members were asked to bring a small amount of food to share. There would be a raffle and memberships could be renewed.

For the first time there would be a meeting in January at which Pete James would talk about the Fardon family.

The Society would celebrate its tenth anniversary in 2021. Members were asked to consider ways in which this might be marked.

Sheila then introduced **Anne Langley who gave a talk on the Warwick County Asylum.**

Anne described life in the asylum in Stretton - on - Dunsmore, the first asylum to be established outside London, in 1815. Before the establishment of asylums children were kept alongside adults in prisons and overcrowding was common. About twenty boys who had offended were housed and taught a trade –farm labouring, making shoes and clothing. Their offences included vagrancy, horse-stealing, house-breaking but some were deprived orphans from Birmingham. Strenuous attempts were made to socialise the boys, many of whom were illiterate but who were taught to read and write. Church attendance on Sundays was compulsory and any boy who had not been baptised, was. Any boy who was disobedient faced the severe punishment of being placed in the cold, dark cellar for a time.

The rehabilitation rate was impressive. Thus only 2 of the 53 boys who stayed over a year re-offended (and some of these were transported to the colonies). Some boys kept in touch with the asylum after they had left and letters showed that they retained reasonably fond memories of their time there. Most boys got a job – tailor, grocer, soldier, gardener, seaman, and ‘something in the gun trade’ was noted in one of the documents.

The asylum was financed by donations from benefactors such as Lord Leigh. Boys were paid for the work they did (10/- a year). The overall costs of keeping a boy was a quarter the cost of keeping them in prison. Despite this, eventually sufficient funds were not forthcoming and the Warwick Asylum had to close. ‘Asylum Farm’ was sold in 1894 (then called ‘Hill Farm’).

The Warwick Asylum was not the only establishment in the area e.g. in 1856 a reformatory was founded in Weston-under-Wetherly and this continued the 'battle' between punishment and reform (as, later, with the formation of 'borstals' N.B. There were reformatories for girls too – e.g., Allesley Reform School – where girls were trained as servants but far fewer girls than boys offended.

Anne finished her talk with readings about Christmas Days in 1915 and 1916 in the Rugby Workhouse. There was greater economy in 1916 but it was clear that a generous feast, plus gifts, and musical entertainment were still provided.

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Sheila thanked Anne for an interesting talk and Jane Taylor and Patrick Sawdon for providing refreshments.

Anne had brought a variety of her publications for sale, and Christmas cards for her chosen charity, CRUSE Bereavement Care, to whom her fee for the evening was donated.

Members were also referred to the Our Warwickshire website on which people were encourage to share their memories of school, work, the environment etc. through photographs and reminiscences. www.ourwarwickshire.org.uk

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