

## NOTES OF THE SHS MEETING HELD ON 28 SEPTEMBER 2021

**Present:** 19 members and guests

**Apologies:** Nora Blagburn, Celia Baly, Pam Baker, Clare Clarke, Liz Sykes, Dilys Davies, David & Jean Vaughan, Maggie Moorhouse, Douglas Faulconbridge, June Burr.

**Introduction:** Sheila Woolf welcomed members and guests to the meeting, the first 'live' one since February 2020. Due to remaining COVID restrictions, arrangements were rather different, e.g. no refreshments, but it is hoped that these can be eased for the October meeting.

Sheila thanked all SHS members who had helped in any way with the recent, very successful, '1000 years of Stoneleigh History' show. Thanks also due to the Stoneleigh Male Voice Choir, Jinty Cotton and Susan Spencer for musical backup. Bill Crofts is putting a video together and this will be shown at the November meeting, after which it will be available on YouTube. Thanks to Stoneleigh United Charities who had made a donation of £ 250 and to the Kenilworth branch of Sainsburys who had contributed £100 worth of wine. A cheque for £1200 had been presented to the Mayor of Kenilworth's charities: Kenilworth Youth Well-Being Hub and Compassionate Kenilworth. £250 had been donated to Stoneleigh church and £410 had gone to SHS funds.

Sheila also thanked all SHS members for the generous gifts she had received, all greatly appreciated...a lead crystal rose bowl (and roses), book/gift token for Kenilworth Books, and a painting of her cottage by Mel Dearing.

The October meeting would be a welcome return visit from Dr Richard Churchley, who would be speaking on "Old Pubs and Lost Hostelries".

Sheila then welcomed David Morse for an illustrated talk on **The Warwickshire Home Guard of WW2.**

David gave a brief summary of the period 1933-38 and the build up to War. Numerous organisations in the UK started monitoring what Germany was up to. War was declared on 3 September 1939. The RAF was expanded and weapon stores increased. Sir Anthony Eden encouraged 17-65 year old not in the Army to volunteer for the Local Defence Volunteers ('Look, Duck and Vanish'!!) and 2 million did so initially although many quickly changed their minds. Cadet forces were set up in schools. Initially, the Army objected to LDV being armed so they were very scantily equipped, with few rifles (many limited to only 3 bullets!), machine guns petrol bombs and ingenious home made weapons.

Sir Winston Churchill disliked the term LDV and so the Home Guard was born and thus their reputation was enhanced and equipment and training greatly improved. Waterproof uniform was also provided. Meanwhile, it became clear that Germany planned to invade, initially along the Norfolk coast and the south coast ports. This meant that there was a phenomenal amount of work for the Home Guard to do, including building huge trenches to stop German tanks crossing the country. Various 'Companies' were formed of Home Guard members in different areas to protect bridges, block roads and canals etc. Various counter-defence tactics were devised to inhibit invaders e.g. 'Flaming Fougasses' setting fires on the sea, and at

crossroads. Cycle platoons were established comprising men who knew local roads. Later some companies, e.g. Kenilworth, were supplied with motor cycles.

David showed an amazing array of ordnance, guns, and armoured cars and other motorised devices. Great ingenuity was displayed in thinking about ways to hamper the German advance (if it came), including the well-known changing of signposts. Pigeons were used to carry messages.

Women were involved in the Home Guard but could not be armed although they were taught how to use a rifle. They excelled at unarmed combat and were far better signallers than men. Edith Summerskill established the Women's Home Defence League in which women performed many crucial roles.

Despite the enormous amount of effort expended by the Home Guard, it was only formally recognised by the British Army after 1942 and given the respect it deserved.

Of particular interest was Churchill's Secret Army which comprised local units of residents – farmers, landowners, poachers, gamekeepers etc.- with detailed local knowledge who became trained saboteurs, radio operators, intelligence gatherers and trained assassins!

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David invited members to look at his selection of weapons etc. Some members had brought photographs of relatives who had served in the Home Guard so this was an opportunity to exchange experiences informally.

For more information go to the Warwickshire Home Guard Living History Group, and other links to 'Home Guard' on Google.

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David was thanked for his fascinating talk.

Msw/4/10/21