

## Stoneleigh History Society

Meeting held on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2023

### Minutes

1. Welcome.
2. Apologies: Ruth Oliver, Maggie Moorhouse, Sue Crofts, Pam Baker, Sue Line, Jean Vaughan, Ken Wallis, Pam Long, Mel Dearing, Anthony Bianco, Trevor Hancock, Margaret Brown.

Nos. 20  
Visitors 0

3. Notices.

Sheila introduced the evening, stating the evening's speaker fee was to be kindly donated to Macmillan Nurses.

Sheila mentioned the trip to St Mary's Guildhall in August, which everyone had enjoyed. On 25<sup>th</sup> November this year Warwick Local History Society are planning to visit the Guild Hall, so if you missed our trip or would like to go again... Details will be on their website. (Stop Press: by coincidence I received a booking form on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup>. The trip includes the cathedral. Please see attachment, and note that Rowan Fisher, the organiser, says that places will go quickly as there are only 40 available. We are affiliated members so the price would be the cheaper of the two given – Sheila)

Lisa Reay informed the membership of a visit to Princethorpe College at 2pm on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2024. Transport details to follow.

Pete James was presented with a token of appreciation for all the talks he has provided over the years. Peter has retired from preparing and delivering historical talks.

Sheila was pleased to announce that with the help of Peter Whitehouse and Malcolm Murphy a blue plaque honouring the original inventor of the bicycle, Edward Langley Fardon, who moved to the village in 1873, will be displayed, pending permission, on the forge where he worked.

4. This evening's speakers were Sarah & Steve Boden. The subject of their talk was "The history and future of the Pantomime"

Sarah & Steven run Imagine Theatre. The company is responsible for the production of 22 shows, comprising 19 pantomimes and 3 Christmas shows. Locally they produce Pantomimes at the Spa Centre, Belgrade and Leicester.

The business is located at Coventry airport, employing 30 staff with a 22,000 square foot storage facility.

Imagine Theatre has won 3 pantomime awards.

Steve & Sarah then went on to explain the origins of Pantomime, and talked about how it has evolved over time. Pantomime originally started in 16<sup>th</sup> century Italy, with characters such as, Zannis (male), Columbina (female), Pantalone (baddie) & Innamorati (a pair of young lovers).

The storyline was based around young lovers being split up by a father figure.

The second Zannis was an acrobat which over time transformed to the character of Harlequin.

Some key dates:

- John Rich produced the first real Pantomime in 1721, titled The Magician. The show was packed full of spectacle such as fire breathing and cartwheels. The shows were not intended to be watched by children.
- 1806, Harlequin and Mother Goose were the first pantomimes to be performed at Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.
- 1843 saw the removal of the "Theatres Act" which allowed performers to sing and dance without permission of the monarch.
- Cinderella was first performed in 1697, but it wasn't until 1860 that the ugly sisters were introduced, and the character Prince Charming was introduced after the First World War. The glass slipper was originally a pearl slipper. A mix up in the similarity of the French word for glass and pearl resulted in the pearl slipper being replaced with a glass slipper.
- In 1880 Dan Leno played a pantomime dame. Principal boys were played by females, who were allowed to do so when playing the part of a boy, whereas due to Victorian rules, females were not otherwise able to show their legs.
- In the 1950's and 1960's, however, principal boys were played by male stars such as Norman Wisdom and Cliff Richard. This was reversed again by Cilla Black in the 1970's. The Belgrade Theatre is unique in that the principal boy is still played by a female. Presently celebrities and TV stars attract audiences, making it easier to sell tickets, although the definition of a celebrity is more blurred now.

Steve and Sarah went on to explain their current timetable of activities that support the 18-month schedule of producing their shows – scripts, casting, props, set design, contracts etc. The statistics involved were quite mind-boggling!

They finished by discussing the future of pantomimes with the use of digital technology for the backdrops in place of traditional scenery. This new technology is allied to the gaming industry.

Sarah and Steve brought along some costumes and props for us to look at. Their whole business is run from a warehouse in Siskin Drive near the airport, and they extended a welcome to visitors to see the extraordinary collection there!

5. Sheila thanked Sarah and Steve for their talk. Over refreshments everyone agreed that it had been an amazing story of a successful business situated just up the road!
6. Closure.
7. Date of next meeting. 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023 – Paul Waddoups will speak about "The Kilsby Tunnel Murder Mystery 1906". Returning to school at Princethorpe, the young daughter of a French aristocrat is found dead in Kilsby Tunnel. Is it suicide, a terrible accident, or the work of the Railway Ripper?

*Clare Neale 27.9.23*