

Stoneleigh History Society
Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 28th of November 2023 at 7.30 pm.

1. Sheila welcomed everyone to the meeting
2. There were 25 members, and 5 visitors present. Two members sent their apologies in advance of the meeting.
3. There were a number of notices:
 - a. Sheila reminded everyone about the Christmas Social on the 12th of December. Please bring nibbles and donations for the raffle. Wine and juice will be provided.
 - b. There will be a trip to Princethorpe College on February the 13th. The visit starts at 2pm and there will be a talk plus a tour around the school.
 - c. Phil Jones has tickets for the Stoneleigh Male Voice Choir's Christmas concert at Stoneleigh Abbey. It is to be held on the 6th of December.
 - d. The History Society's programme for 2024 can be found on the SHS website. Membership renewals will be welcome during the month of January.
4. Sheila introduced the speaker for the evening – Christine Cluley a well-known historian/researcher who has worked on a number of Heritage Education projects. Her topic for the evening –

Cicely Anne Lucas nee Neale (1879 – 1970)

Cicely – pronounced Sizely – was one of 4 children. Her mother Sarah came from Winterbourne Stoke just 3 miles from Stonehenge and her father Edwin was from Dorset. They were both teachers and after they married in the mid 1870s they moved to Westwood Heath School which was in a rural area on the outskirts of Coventry. Edwin was Headmaster.

The family lived in a new schoolhouse built by William Henry Leigh for the benefit of the village of Westwood Heath. For a while they shared the property with the gatekeeper of Stoneleigh Abbey. Lord Leigh was a 'liberal' landlord who did a lot to improve the lives of his tenants.

Cicely had 3 brothers and as was the custom of the day was expected to contribute to the running of the household. She did a lot of the household chores, tended to the garden and cared for the livestock. In her later recollections she considered herself to have been 'a skivvy'.

In her recollections of life in Westwood Heath she recalled the itinerant scissor grinder, the rag and bone man, the chimney sweep and one of the last 'German bands' to visit the area. These were German immigrants who toured the country. She also spent time with local gypsies.

Cicely's childhood was turned upside down when her father was accused of having an affair with one of his female staff members. He was forced to give up his job and left with one of his younger children to live in his home county of Dorset. Cecil, his eldest son was at Teacher Training College and eventually he replaced his father as Head teacher at Westwood Heath School.

Cicely also wanted to become a teacher but needed to get her qualifications. She attended Coventry School of Art in Ford Street and walked there from Westwood Heath which was an 8-mile round trip. On one of her journeys, she met a young man called Ernest Lucas. He was unhappy with a young girl walking unaccompanied and so joined her. They became friends. Cicely got her qualifications and took up a place at Derby Teacher Training College. After 2 years there she started her first job at Highfield School in Saltley, Birmingham. With an income of her own Cicely was able to buy a small house in Mary Road, Yardley. To enable her parents to be reconciled she invited Sarah and Edwin to live with her.

With her teaching career going well, Cicely moved to Canterbury Cross School in Handsworth. This was the first school where she became Head teacher. While in Birmingham Cicely became a strong supporter of the Suffragette movement. She attended marches, spoke at rallies in Birmingham and Hyde Park. However, she had to tread a very fine line as her teaching career could be threatened if she became too prominent. She did though, protest in other ways by refusing to participate in the 1911 Census. The original shows a handwritten comment saying, 'daughter is a Suffragette'.

Cicely and Ernest eventually married and in 1912 he was invited to become a teacher at the British Embassy in Paris. Cicely joined him despite not wishing to learn to speak French or involve herself in French cultural life. When she became pregnant, she insisted on going back to Westwood Heath to have the baby. At the outbreak of war in 1914 Cicely, Ernest and their daughter also called Cicely were on holiday in the French countryside. They were not aware of the seriousness of the situation and eventually, hurriedly and separately made their way back to England.

With her money and possessions in France Cicely got a job teaching at a school in Cheylesmore, Coventry. Ernest also made his way back to England and secured a post as head teacher at Claverdon School. Cicely joined him in Claverdon where they bought a bungalow. In 1916, Cicely got a job at Solihull C of E Girls' School. She became head teacher and remained there for 23 years, retiring in 1939 aged 60.

During her time in Claverdon she became a notable local 'character'. She always walked to the station to get the train to Solihull and apparently the train driver held the train in the station until she arrived! In 1940 she bought a gypsy caravan which was parked in the garden for her 'domestic help' to live in! She is remembered by locals as being 'a small woman, beefy, wore silk dresses and lace up black shoes. She had prominent blue eyes and lovely handwriting. She was stern but kind and made hot cocoa for the children who had walked a long way to get to school'.

Cicely had strong principles and had little time for 'the establishment'. She and Ernest visited Russia in 1938. They took lots of photographs while they were there but clearly, they were shielded from the privations of the Russian people during the height of the Stalinist era. Cicely wrote articles for local newspapers on issues that concerned her, she was an advocate for local people and was prominent in the

campaign to keep a local beauty spot – Yarningale Common – available for local people to use.

While in Claverdon Ernest had time to paint which was his passion. His paintings were popular with American clients. He died in 1951 and after that Cicely lost interest in her life in Claverdon. Daughter Cicely was gifted academically and after attending King's High in Warwick she studied at Girton College, Cambridge. She had a number of teaching jobs and it's possible that she worked at the Foreign Office in London. With her daughter having a house in London Cicely senior moved in. The arrangement did not work out and Cicely Snr. took a room at 'The Clarendon Hotel' in Blackheath. Even though she was getting on in years she took on the job of tutoring the young son of the owner. However, it all came to a sudden end when, not paying attention to traffic outside the hotel she was knocked down and later died in hospital.

Cicely was 91 and at her funeral her grandson gave a moving eulogy recounting the life of a Warwickshire woman who had had humble origins but achieved so much.

Further information about Cicely can be found at :

SolihullLife.org - [Mapping Women's Suffrage.org.uk](http://MappingWomen'sSuffrage.org.uk) - [Our Warwickshire.org.uk](http://OurWarwickshire.org.uk)

5. Sheila thanked Christine for her presentation and the audience then had coffee and biscuits.
6. The meeting closed at 9.30pm.
7. Next meeting - Christmas social on the 12th of December at 7.30 pm.

N.B. Since Tuesday's meeting I have learnt that quite a number of you had difficulty hearing the speaker and seeing the slides clearly. I do apologise and Sheila and I will be investigating the purchase of a microphone and looking at ways in which we can better set out the hall so that all of you will be able to see and hear properly. Sue