

## Stoneleigh History Society

### Minutes of the meeting held on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2026 at Stoneleigh Village Hall 7.30 pm.

1. Sheila welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were 25 members present and three guests. Apologies were received from Pam Baker, Jill Kashi, Pete James, Celia Baly, Douglas Faulconbridge, Clive and Gill Watson.
2. Sheila introduced the first Speaker for the evening:

#### **Sue Crofts SHS member, on 'The brass band conductor and his defiant daughter.'**

Sue explained the context of her presentation first.

She had started her family history research in 2006 and soon discovered that there were gaps which could not be explained. Her grandmother Emily Evans (nee Holdsworth) sometimes talked of a stepmother who was very cruel and made her look after her half siblings despite being very young herself. She also talked of her father who played the cornet in a brass band and often came home very late after playing in competitions. She also talked of a woman from Bradford called Ruby. Sue's father was unable to provide any further information to fill in the gaps so Sue embarked on a process of phoning and writing to people who might be able to help. Eventually information began to emerge which showed that her great grandfather Jeremiah or Jerry Holdsworth was a well known cornet player who had conducted a number of famous brass bands winning many prizes along the way. He was born in 1868 in Scholes and his full-time job was as a 'thick wire drawer' at a large steel works in Cleckheaton, but in the summer months he devoted his time to travelling around the country playing or conducting.

He married at 19 years of age and had two children, Emily and Ada. His first wife died of TB when the youngest child was just five months old. He married again two years later and had a further nine children, eight of whom survived.

His success as a brass band conductor led him to move the family to Northampton where he led the Rushden Temperance Band amongst others in the region. While in Northampton his eldest child Emily married a co-worker at a boot and shoe factory and in 1908 moved to Leicester.

Jerry also left Northampton and moved his family back to West Yorkshire and settled in Wyke.

His second eldest daughter Ada remained in Northampton, working as a waitress.

In 1915, Ada moved to Leicester and lodged close to where her sister lived. Ada was pregnant and in 1916 gave birth to a girl she called Ruby.

The information regarding the existence of Ada and her child Ruby was a revelation. Sue discovered that due to family disapproval of Ada and her actions she had been 'airbrushed' out of family history.

Ada became 'the defiant daughter' because she refused to listen to the family and went her 'own way' by taking her baby with her to join the married man Jack Skerry with whom she had forged a relationship. She followed him to his hometown of Harrogate and obtained a job at The Langham Hotel. Her defiance had limits though because Emily's husband Arnie went to Harrogate and removed baby Ruby from Ada and took her to Wyke where she remained never to see her mother ever again.

Ada remained in Harrogate and had a further six children with Jack. He later abandoned her and went back to live with his wife. Ada lived in Acklam where Jack had left her and the children, and she ended her days in 1977 without ever re-engaging with her Holdsworth family.

Meanwhile back in Wyke Jerry resumed his brass band career, but after a bout of bronchitis he died of heart failure in late 1916. He was 48.

Two years later his second wife Laura died after catching influenza. That left 8 orphaned Holdsworth children, the eldest being 25 and the youngest 5! The three youngest boys went into the care of local community homes while the remainder looked to their own devices or to the family.

Jerry's death was a shock to the local and national brass band community and Sue gave extracts from two obituaries which showed the depth of feeling for him. Sue summed up by saying that as a result of family history research she had discovered a substantial number of relatives she never knew she had and with their help had extended her family tree and had filled in those mysterious gaps. A lesson to all of us perhaps; if there are questions about your family's history 'strike while the iron is hot' and ask those who might be able to help before it's too late.

**Sheila introduced the second speaker SHS member Maggie Moorhouse on 'Coventry Whitefriars – from religious foundation to workhouse'**

Maggie began by thanking SHS member Rob Orland who had provided material and images from his 'Historic Coventry' website.

Maggie continued by explaining the origins of the monastery i.e. founded in 1342 for Carmelite friars on land acquired by Sir John Poultney a prominent London merchant and former Lord Mayor of London. It became known as Whitefriars due to their white hoods.

What remains today is part of the original monastery and the gatehouse on Much Park Street. Charles Dickens referred to 'the Whitefriars arch' in 'The Old Curiosity Shop'.

In the Middle Ages Coventry was visited by many pilgrims due to the large number of abbeys and monasteries but after the Dissolution the drop in pilgrims visiting the area greatly affected population numbers and the economy. After the Dissolution a local man John Hales bought Whitefriars and the Old Grammar School. There is evidence to show that Hales authorised the removal of timber from Whitefriars to construct furniture for the school.

Hales was responsible for other buildings in the town and it is said that Elizabeth the first stayed at Hales Place during her one and only visit to Coventry in 1565. During the Civil War in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Coventry supported the Parliamentarians and while under siege from the Royalists who were encamped at Stoneleigh Whitefriars took a direct hit. There was serious damage and loss of life. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Whitefriars was turned into a workhouse. The former east cloister was glazed and became the refectory. Well before the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 Coventry was well known for providing good care for its inmates, but following the passing of this act provision was reduced. The type of care was reduced to the minimum allowed, with segregation of families, uniforms, repetitive work and basic education for children provided. The derogatory terms used to classify inmates were typical of a system that was found to be essential by some but derided by many.

In one instance in 1887 the Temperance Society complained that inmates were provided with beer at Christmas.

Following the collapse of the weaving industry in the 1860s and 1870s there was a big increase in the numbers of people seeking poor relief.

Despite the efforts of philanthropists like Lord Leigh in building Leigh Mills there was extensive hardship.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century new buildings were added to the workhouse. Brick Kiln Lane became Gulson Road and in 1925 the Children's Hospital and Infirmary opened.

In more recent times – 1948 the workhouse system finally came to an end with the introduction of the NHS and local social services.

Whitefriars became a Salvation Army Hostel. When this closed Whitefriars underwent many changes of ownership and in 2026 is now the responsibility of the Herbert Gallery and Museum. The future of this organisation itself is uncertain so who knows what might happen to Whitefriars in the years to come.

3. Sheila thanked Sue and Maggie for their presentations and the meeting adjourned for refreshments. Thanks to members for providing them.
3. Sheila resumed the meeting by giving out notices.
  - a. Sheila appealed to members to help boost SHS membership by bringing a friend to future meetings.
  - b. She asked for feedback on a suggestion that membership might be boosted by the SHS meeting on an afternoon rather than the evening.
  - c. Lisa has now become our Marketing Officer and will be increasing our presence on social media. New people moving to the village need to find out what organisations they could support.
  - d. AGM: all existing committee members have agreed to put their names forward for re-election but offers from other members to join and help in any way they can are welcome. Sue has nomination forms.
  - e. Stoneleigh Male voice choir has an event planned for the 21<sup>st</sup> of March. 'An evening of song and entertainment' in aid of Prostate Cancer Research will take place in the Stoneleigh Village Hall. See Phil Jones for tickets.
  - f. Mel Bianco has an exhibition coming soon at the Herbert.
  - g. The metal Detectorist group has an event on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March at the Blacksmith's Arms.
  - h. Sheila commended the visits and talks organised by the WLHS.
  - i. University of Warwick undergraduates have undertaken a project entitled 'Pathways to the Past'. It is intended to encourage students to take an interest in the history of their local areas. There will be an online event on Saturday the 28<sup>th</sup> of Feb at 3pm.
4. The next meeting will be on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March. The speaker will be Richard Churchley. His topic will be 'Songs the Victorians Sang'.  
Before the talk it will be our AGM – Reports from SHS Officers will be circulated prior to the meeting.
5. The meeting closed at 21.15.

