

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STONELEIGH HISTORY SOCIETY HELD ON 24 May 2022

Present: 20 members of the SHS. One new member, Ernie Ball – welcome to our 43rd member.

Apologies: Margaret Brown, Sarah Ballinger, Pam Long, Pam Baker, Ruth Oliver, Jill Kashi, Sue Line, Jean Vaughan, Liz Sykes and Rob Orland.

Welcome: Sheila Woolf welcomed everyone to the meeting. Thanks to Clare and Adrian for organising the refreshments.

The loose-leaved folders containing Stoneleigh memories were available to view at the back of the Hall. Many thanks to Derek and Rob for having transposed so much of the material to such a high quality. Thank also to Anthony for having secured a grant of £200 from a WDC fund which means that all our costs were covered.

Unfortunately it had not been possible to organise a June visit to Maxstoke Castle so there would be no formal meeting during the summer and this would be our last until September. On Sunday 12 June Open Gardens at Packington Hall, and on Sunday 19 June the gardens at Maxstoke are open. So members might want to take advantage of those informally.

Sheila then welcomed our speaker, Eric Lawley, a Trustee of Chedham's Yard Living Museum and Heritage Site in Wellesbourne. www.chedhamsyard.org.uk He was accompanied by his wife, Gill Lawley, also a Trustee who had brought along examples of crafts made at the Yard.

The Blacksmith's was at the back of the Stag Inn (recently destroyed by fire). The extensive Chedham family settled in Church Walk and the Yard was founded in 1711, the family running it for 150 years as both a wheelwright and a blacksmith's. The business was closed in the 1960s and by 2000 the original buildings were in dis-use and overgrown. At that time the Council asked for £10,000 to enable the establishment of a working party under the Parish Council to consider how to revive the Chedham's Yard buildings. Extensive work was carried out locally to gauge the feasibility of a restoration project. In 2006 the third series of the BBC's 'Restoration' programme was launched, and it was decided to enter Chedham's Yard. A very laborious programme of activities eventually resulted in this application being successful, despite huge local disruption and resentment. The winning entry merely had the *right* to submit more detailed applications. Eventually 25% came from the Restoration Trust, 75 % from the Heritage Lottery. £70,000 was belatedly found as extra investment but the capital could not be spent for 10 years!

After this, serious work began by volunteers. A Plan of Activity was drawn up. All remaining artifacts (4500) were itemised. There were archaeological surveys (severely hampered by serious floods in July 2007 which covered 6ft of land). All remaining buildings were stripped out and renovated. By 2010 a Visitor Centre and Cafe were opened. In 2012 the whole Yard was open to the public on designated dates from Easter Saturday to the end of September, with occasional openings for other events. There are numerous demonstrations and special

events (booking required, e.g. 'Blacksmith Experiences). Weekday group visits can be booked so that visitors can see the range of crafts on show. There are numerous educational visits for children. A recent innovation has been personal skills training for young people

An article appears in the monthly village magazine and there are regular publicity announcements via the Yard and village websites.

The Yard's motto is 'Preserving the Past for the Future', something the volunteers obviously do their very best to support.

Sheila thanked Eric for his fascinating talk. Gill sold various carved wooden objects and ironwork and answered questions about the various craft activities carried out at the Yard

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