

Stretton on Dunsmore History Society

Origins

In 1998 a local small-holder, who had been born and raised in the village, suggested that a history of Stretton on Dunsmore should be written. A team of local people was assembled and the local community invited to become involved. After a great deal of effort (and with financial support from the Millennium Commission, Rugby Borough Council and the Parish Council) a village history was published to celebrate the millennium. A copy of the first edition was given to local schoolchildren and the remaining copies sold out in no time, requiring a hasty reprint. Since one of the conditions set by the Millennium Commission was that ongoing heritage aspects should be addressed, a local history society was set up in early 2001. Initial meetings were held in the local nursery school, with chairs unsuited to adult posteriors and an audience that was sometimes outnumbered by the tadpoles in the aquarium. A move to larger chairs in the primary school and then the village hall proved more popular and the membership is now over 30, with other regular visitors.

The Society today

The Society has established a pattern of monthly meetings with speakers but also including a couple of outings and a quiz each year. We also show old photographs and sell booklets at village events. We provide talks and a historical treasure hunt for local school children. Members have hosted tours around the village for other history groups. A web-site has been set up that attracts people from all over the world with connections to Stretton on Dunsmore (www.stretton-on-dunsmore-history.org.uk) and we endeavour to assist enquirers with their family history research. A small collection of archives and artefacts has been collected; it is displayed on suitable occasions but more work needs to be done conserving these items and making them accessible to the public.

Research projects

Members of the Society have carried out research on various topics: local censuses, parish records, the two World Wars (including the local monument commemorating George V's inspection of the troops before they set off for Gallipoli), the Fosse Way, field names, the 1704 enclosure, agricultural drainage pioneer Joseph Elkington, the school logbooks and Warwick County Asylum (a local reformatory, *not* Hatton lunatic asylum). Most of these projects have led to talks and publications to disseminate knowledge of our past and two of our members offer a range of illustrated talks.

Celebrations

A plaque about Joseph Elkington was unveiled in the village by a Canadian descendant as part of a commemoration 200 years after he died (see photo). Flowers were laid on the Elkington memorial in Stretton churchyard by another descendant and an American professor gave a speech after lunch in a Princethorpe pub close to where Joseph lived and worked. A well-attended exhibition was held during a weekend in 2011 to celebrate the first 10 years of the Society. At present we are hoping to produce a memorial to the men who died in the two World Wars.

Highlights and lowlights

Members have enjoyed visits to a wide variety of local places of historic interest. One member showed us her collection of laundry equipment (illustrated by a washing line of old-fashioned ladies underwear!) Volunteers have dressed up in civil war armour and medieval archer's costume. A retired local publican attracted an audience of over a hundred with his childhood memories. Local people have shared their stories about cycling for Britain, playing football for Coventry City and visiting the Berlin wall. We have had speakers who cancelled at very short notice and a soggy guided walk along the canal at Braunston. Overall however it is heartening to see the number of people who stay behind after a talk quizzing the speaker over refreshments and offering help with washing up and stacking chairs.