

Glensford Local History Society

Meeting held: 10 September 1998

The History of Stoke College

There was a very good audience to hear our first speaker of the new season. Derek Marshall, the former Head Teacher at Stoke College, gave a very interesting talk on the almost 1000 years of habitation at this site, and the links with the throne and Westminster. Derek made it clear that the "college" of today bears a title which would have originally been applied to a religious institution.

We now know that in 1124, monks were living there, and it is believed that, under the main car park, there may be the remains of a chapel. The river was straightened to make a mill race and, as the river marks the boundary between Suffolk and Essex, there was much contention as to who owned what.

The house was made of Normandy stone which had had to be shipped from France, and probably then brought up the river from the coast. After the Reformation, which came late to this area, the house passed into private ownership, including Matthew Parker, who later became Archbishop of Canterbury. He gave 800 ounces of silver to be made into a tankard which was later presented to Sudbury.

Another resident was John Elwes, who was renowned as a miser, and secreted money throughout the house.

More recently, the house was owned by the Lock family. One Lady Lock was a keen gardener who exhibited at Chelsea, and sent produce to Covent Garden, sometimes in her Rolls Royce!. She received the first royal chrysanthemum to be allowed out of Japan. She was known to visit her greenhouse in the middle of the night to watch a rare flower open.

One of her many visitors was Amy Johnson, who is said to have landed on the meadow.

In 1954, the building took on its present status as a school. During alterations, a priest hole was discovered built into a chimney between the floors. Almost inevitably ghost stories abound.

This was a first class start to the new season; if the rest of our speakers reach this standard, the whole year will be a great success.

(From notes by Esme Smith)

This digest has been put together by the Society; we hope it is a fair representation of the talk; any faults are ours, and we apologise for them.