**Stratford sub Castle Guild May 2019 Meeting Review**

**AGM and ‘American Diners – Then and Now’**

As AGM’s go, this was well attended, reasonably quick and painless, leaving plenty of time for Jim Platt (one of our members) to share details of his long time passion with American Diners. Jim got interested in diners on his first visit to the US in 1972, when Heather and her parents introduced him to his first American diner, just outside New York in New Jersey. He was mesmerised by the pie counter. Coming from austerity Britain he had never seen pies with two inch thick fillings. Researching over 10 years whilst living in America, Jim visited many diners and Diner Conventions (with his long suffering wife) and purchased many books on the subject, making him somewhat of an expert on the subject. Jim, donning his diner style chef’s hat, explained that the diner originated in Providence, Rhode Island in 1872 when Walter Scott served sandwiches, coffee, pies, and eggs to people late at night, out of a horse-pulled wagon, including to employees of the Providence Journal. Scott's dinercan be considered the first diner with walk-up service, as it had windows on each side of the wagon. He quit his job as a printer on the Journal to sell food from the wagon. Soon other companies followed to produce lunch wagons or early diners.

Diners in the 1930s had a streamlined design, featuring bullet-shaped exteriors and chrome interiors. The streamlined modern design of the diner first appeared in the 1930s in an effort to change their image. The futuristic designs reflected the modern era. During the Depression many diners stayed in business due to their low cost menus.

Prior to WW II diners were mainly staffed by men. During the war they needed to switch to women as other industries did. Jim showed us an article from a 1941 Diner Magazine stating that women were better suited to work in diners because –

 Women will work for less pay

 Women don’t stay out late drinking

 Women belong around food

 Women will work harder than men

 Women are always happy

 Women are more honest than men

 Women clean diners better than men

 More women patronise the diner

(Have we progressed since then??)

The 20 years after World War II was the golden era of diners when they moved to the suburbs and attracted families. A diner was an easy business for a veteran to set up using his demob grant. The look of the diner changed with shining stainless steel exteriors, large windows, wooden booths, Formica countertops lined with stools, porcelain tiles, mock leather seat coverings and terrazzo floors.

The 1970s saw the nadir of the stainless steel diner but in the late 1980s a revival took place and diners were built with a retro look. Since the 1980s, most newly constructed diners lack the original narrow, stainless steel, streamlined appearance, and are usually much bigger buildings, though some are still made of several prefabricated modules, manufactured by the old diner builders and assembled on site.

We were treated to a large number of photos reflecting the changing styles of diners, many of which Jim had visited to sample the delights.

The diner is an icon of American culture; during elections, political candidates often make a stop at the local diner to meet voters. Jim drew his most enjoyable talk to a close by showing us pictures of President Obama, Hilary Clinton and even President Trump, enjoying the diner atmosphere, plus some pictures of famous diners which are still thriving.

The Gift Bowl raised £91 for The Trussell Trust charity.

Our meeting in June is the Summer Social.  
 *Barbara Mayall*