**Stratford sub Castle Guild March 2019**

**Lost in the Cloud Ros Liddington**

Have you got a lot of “stuff” in your garage, loft or spare room? Or have you downsized and thrown away much of the “stuff” you used to own? Ros Liddington opened her talk with these words and followed them up by making an impassioned plea for us to retain objects from our past. Those of us who have digitised our photos for example may find that one day CDs will become unreadable and “the Cloud” may be inadvertently (or deliberately) switched off. Where will we be then? She showed us a photo of her aunt that had been passed down the family. Subsequent investigation had revealed that this aunt had been at the battle of Inchon, a decisive battle of the Korean War. Ros then found a very small camera and high-power lens that had belonged to her. Her conclusion – the aunt had been up to some nefarious activity. Ros is the Education Officer at Wilton House and also spends a lot of time visiting schools to enthuse children about history. She uses a variety of artefacts (old “stuff” she has collected) to create back stories that bring the objects to life. And she did the same with us, encouraging us to take part and develop stories of our own.

Out of her bag came a badger’s skull, not to be confused with that of a fox which is quite a different shape as shown by a fur stole with the fox’s head still attached. Remember your grandmother wearing one of those? I do. This introduced the issue of whether we should suppress non-PC items, books statues, etc. Ros argued vehemently that they represent an important part of our shared history and showed today’s generation what people experienced and believed in the past, in this case only two generations ago. In a similar vein she held up an 1897 edition of Britannica, in poor condition with no spine left, but still quite readable. Articles from this described the wonderful British Empire and the maps depicted a world largely forgotten.

We then had our own task to undertake. Ros divided us into four groups and handed out a load of gloves, some old some more modern, to each group. Our job was to select the glove that excited us and to make up a back story that would make it a “must see” item for visitors to the museum displaying it. There were some very inventive stories. Then Ros gave us an actual story relating to one of the pairs of gloves which were owned by an SOE Radio Operator and worn at a big party after the war.

Story after story was related, all with the same message, artefacts have a lot to tell us if we only listen, and modern electronic storage stores the wrong things (pictures of cats and breakfasts or conversations), is very costly and can break down. One of the final examples concerned an oil painting that Ros had found, stacked in a store room, early in her time at Wilton. She thought it depicted Mary Sidney, wife of the 2nd Earl of Pembroke, but there was no proof. Some time later, while clearing out another room, Ros came across a book of lace patterns that belonged to Mary Sidney. The lace in the painting matched a pattern in the book and the connection was made. The portrait now hangs above the fireplace in one of Wilton’s grand rooms.

We were all beginning to wonder where all this “stuff” could be stored however and Ros had an answer. In Cheshire there are old salt mines that have over 100 miles of tunnels, all wide and high. They are already being used for storage and she showed us a photo of one gallery with high shelving crammed with boxes.

Ros had entertained us so magnificently that there was no time for questions, but afterwards I was able to reassure her that our new village History Group had been set up partly to catalogue and conserve the items, mouldering in various lofts, left by residents who are sadly no longer with us. She was very encouraged by that.

Our next meeting is on 10th April when David Tovey will be telling us about the “History of the Ambulance Service”.

*David Balston*