

THERE IS A LOT MORE TO STAFFORD AND THE SURROUNDING AREAS THAN MEETS THE EYE, WE HAVE DUG UP SOME OF THE MORE AMAZING AND AMUSING FACTS ABOUT THE AREA AND THE LEWIS PARTNERSHIP.

# FASCINATING Stafford

■ Stafford means 'ford' by a 'staithe' (landing place). The town's location was the only feasible place for a large army to cross the River Trent, and so was strategically important in the wider region

The answer to the code still remains very much an enigma. For further details visit [www.shugborough.org.uk](http://www.shugborough.org.uk), the estate is located on the edge of Cannock Chase approximately 4 miles from The Swan and Moat House hotels

■ Popular tourist attraction, Shugborough Hall and Estate, the ancestral home of the Earls of Lichfield is home to what is believed to be a significant clue in the on-going quest for The Holy Grail. The code sits beneath a marble relief in the gardens of the home and has foxed generations of visitors, including Darwin and Dickens



■ The owners of The Moat House and The Swan, the Lewis family, had never even pulled a pint until the opening night of The Moat House in 1988. Since that first foray into the hospitality business they have almost continually grown, gradually developing the offering to include food, weddings, accommodation, events and conferences. None of which any of the family had any experience in prior to opening.



■ The 2006 festive period proved to be one of the busiest yet for The Lewis Partnership. The Swan served a total of 5589 customers in the brasserie restaurant and The Moat House catered for over 8000 over the Christmas period, now that is a lot of turkey!

■ The Moat House has been named 'Most Popular Civil Wedding Venue' by the Staffordshire health and consumer service every year since in 1998, in that year 50 civil ceremonies were conducted at the venue, in 2006 that figure reached

■ The Swan Hotel has had many famous (and infamous) visitors in its 300 year history, most notably in 1852 when world famous author Charles Dickens spent a night while awaiting a connecting train. The creator of novels including Oliver Twist and A Christmas Carol had a less than enjoyable stay at the hotel, calling the hotel 'The Dodo in the dull High Street.' More recent famous visitors to the venue include Little Britain star, David Walliams and chart-toppers The Sugababes

■ Under a 16th-century Stafford by-law: 'No householder shall keep in his house any manner of person suspect to be of evil demeanour or of unchaste living, upon pain every day offending to forfeit 10s.' This would have been equivalent to more than £300 today

■ Fortunately education in Stafford has improved somewhat since the mid 1800s, during which time Stafford Grammar School



■ Stafford Castle was first built by the Normans, who built a huge timber fortress here around 1100 AD. In the years shortly after the Norman invasion of 1066, William the Conqueror is believed to have ordered defences to be built against a still hostile and rebellious native community

endured the worst headmaster on record. The Revd George Norman reputedly attended school for only three hours a day, refused to teach anything but the classics and used to send boys out to buy drink for him. He managed to hold this position for 34 years!

■ Visitors to Stafford suffering from Seismophobia (the fear of Earthquakes) can rest easy, the only recorded earthquake in the area occurred on January 14th 1916

■ The towns football club, Stafford Rangers, was formed in 1876. The seventies were perhaps the most successful era in the club's history to date and put Stafford Rangers firmly on the map. With the late Roy Chapman as manager, the club recorded a Northern Premier League Championship, FA Trophy and Staffordshire Senior Cup treble in season 1971/72 and another FA Trophy victory in 1979. Successful players that have enjoyed time with the club include Liverpool, Aston Villa and England star Stan Collymore and Leeds United striker, Lee Chapman. Rangers are currently playing in the Nationwide Conference, further details can be found at [www.staffordrangers.co.uk](http://www.staffordrangers.co.uk)

■ Premiership and Championship football clubs located close to Stafford; Aston Villa (Birmingham), Birmingham City, Stoke City, Wolverhampton Wanderers and West Bromwich Albion

■ The original Moat House building dates back to the 14th-century. The building is a grade II\* listed building, but more importantly the mound, which the house is built on, dates back to Norman times and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, a reflection of its historic importance

■ The 2001 census recorded Stafford Borough's population as 120,670 with 59,756

■ The oldest building in Stafford is St Chad's church, located directly opposite The Swan Hotel



■ May 1 2006 marked the 800th anniversary of King John signing the Charter which recognised the Stafford area as a borough. This historic date was celebrated with a number of local events and a special visit from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth

of those being male, leaving a female majority of 60,914

■ Tottenham Hotspur defender, Anthony Gardner hails from Stafford. Anthony began his career at Port Vale and gained his first and only England cap against Sweden in 2004

■ The Stafford Gatehouse theatre has been staging an annual Shakespeare Festival for 17 years, featuring the hugely popular open-air events at Stafford Castle. Running for approximately three weeks in June and July, the event attracts world-class actors

and actresses as well as thousands of visitors from across the UK. 2007's performance will be one of the Bards most popular comedies, Much Ado About Nothing. Further details can be found at [www.staffordgatehousetheatre.co.uk](http://www.staffordgatehousetheatre.co.uk)

■ Weston Park near Stafford is the location for one of the UK's largest annual music festivals. The V Festival has been running at the Staffordshire site since 1996 and regularly attracts the worlds leading performers as well as 90,000 music fans. The festival takes place over two days in August

**Feature**

■ The Lewis Partnership currently employ 243 people, with 101 working at The Swan Hotel and the remaining 142 working at The Moat House. The restaurant and kitchen and kitchen teams employ the most staff at both hotels

■ The Royal Air Force (RAF) base at Stafford opened in 1939 as an equipment supply depot, storing and sending out parts around Europe. It officially closed on Wednesday 29th March 2006

■ The so-called 'Gate Guardian' of RAF Stafford is a Hawker Siddeley Harrier. Since the base ceased being used as an air base in 2006 there has been rumours that the harrier will be moved to a central location in the town



■ Bingley Hall, located at Stafford's County Showground, was once a popular live music venue. During the 70s and 80s it played host to bands including The Who, Black Sabbath, Bob Marley & The Wailers, Bon Jovi and Queen

■ The arms of Staffordshire show a distinctive three-looped knot and the county motto is the knot unites. However this is properly called the Stafford knot since it was the badge of the de Stafford family. The fanciful legend is that three convicted felons who had committed a crime together were due to be executed in Stafford jail. There was argument over who should be hanged first but the hangman solved the problem by devising this knot and hanging the three simultaneously



■ The Lewis Partnership, the family company that owns and runs The Swan and Moat House hotels, also have local business interests in farming (Moat House Farm, Acton Trussell), Spas and Hot Tubs ([www.coastmountainspas.com](http://www.coastmountainspas.com)), marketing ([www.spongemarketing.co.uk](http://www.spongemarketing.co.uk)) and a further hospitality interest in The Bear on Greengate Street ■

Anthony Lewis, right, with business partner Andrew Newsome



If you have any interesting bite size facts that you think people may not know, send them in and we will try and include them in the next issue of Occasions. Send all entries to [Ben@spongemarketing.co.uk](mailto:Ben@spongemarketing.co.uk).