

Triumph and tragedy – a tale of father and son

THE next meeting of Stoke Local History Group will hear the sad but gripping tale of Charles Hathaway - the “genius” behind Siegfried Bettmann’s early Triumph cycle company - and his son Sydney Hathaway, who followed in his father’s footsteps but was tragically killed in the First World War.

The Hathaway family lived at a house in Stoke Park and both Charles and Sydney are named in a memorial at Coventry’s London Road Cemetery.

David Fry will talk about Charles Hathaway, the pioneering Works Manager at the early Triumph Cycle Works, which began in 1890. Hathaway continued to manage production at the company as it



Charles Hathaway, the pioneering Works Manager at Triumph.

went from strength to strength, moving in 1907 to a massive factory in Priory Street, by which time Triumph was also producing motor bikes.

Charles Hathaway was described as a “genius” by Colonel Holbrook, who became Bettmann’s business partner at Triumph in 1919. But by this time, sadly, Charles had tragically died, at the early age of 51.

His son Sydney faced tragedy too, when he was killed in action during the war.

Nigel Clews will talk about Sydney Hathaway, who was employed initially by Triumph as a pupil engineer. In November 1914 the young Sydney enlisted as a Private in the Motorcycle Machine Gun Service (MMGS).

By the end of 1915 he had transferred to the Royal Flying Corps and in January

1916 his plane was shot down by German air ace Max Immelman, the first German pilot to claim eight ‘kills’. Sydney died during the attack – some six months after his father had died - and was buried in a War Grave in France.

The full and fascinating story of both men will be told in a slide show presentation at Stoke Library on Friday March 6th. All welcome.



A Gunner in a Vickers Gunbus, the same type that Sydney died in.

Stoke Local History Group, at Stoke Library, Friday March 6th, beginning at 10.30am

David Fry and Nigel Clews talk about father and son

Charles and Sydney Hathaway

What happened to the old house in Bray's Lane after Stoke Park School moved out?
John Marshall presents the third and final episode of the story

'Burning like a Roman candle' – Hope's Harbour severely hit by fire

ON the evening of January 18th, 1972, a dramatic fire broke out at Hope's Harbour, the old house in Bray's Lane, causing severe damage to the roof and tower. According to a local newspaper report, three fire appliances fought the blaze, with three more on stand-by.

The building's caretaker, Henry Harrison, told the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* that he was alerted to the fire by a passer-by who called the fire brigade.

"By the time I saw it the roof was well alight," he told the paper. And another witness said the burning tower, at the front of the house, "looked like a Roman Candle".



*The fire-ravaged building after the night-time crisis in 1972.
Photo courtesy of Rob Orland / Historic Coventry*

The fire had been noticed at 9.45 at night and firefighters immediately closed Bray's Lane, between Ethelfield Road and Walsgrave Road, as they fought the spreading flames.

It was not until morning that the true scale of damage could be assessed but there was an instant determination to repair the ravaged building.

By this time, Hope's Harbour had enjoyed a long and eventful history since it was first built for Otto Striedinger, the Inspector of Factories, in 1879. It was renamed Harefield House at the end of the 19th century and became the first home of Stoke Park School in 1919.

When Stoke Park School moved out in 1947, the old house was taken over by students from another educational establishment, the Junior Commercial School. This had originally been created at Coventry Technical College in 1936 and initially provided a two-year course, with a vocational emphasis, for boys and girls between the ages of 13 and 15.

It moved to Bray's Lane in 1948 where it was known at first as the Commercial High School, changing its name in 1949 to Churchfield High School. By this time, the school provided a five-year course for pupils, who entered at the age of 11-12. It was a selective school and was described at the time as Coventry's first co-educational grammar school.

But just like Stoke Park School earlier, the new Churchfield High School was severely restricted by overcrowding and lack of space. It was for this reason that Coventry Education Committee decided in 1952 to purchase the house next door, Elm Bank in Stoke Park, once the home of the late Siegfried Bettmann, the founder of Triumph, who had died in 1951.



This view shows the original tower at the front and the south wing on the left.

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The purchase of Elm Bank, and its surrounding grounds, for an estimated cost of about £8,500, provided a convenient extension to Churchfield High School and relieved the pressure of space in the main school buildings. But this was not done without difficulty, since it was discovered that a restrictive covenant existed on the Elm Bank property which limited its use to residential purposes only. This legal difficulty appears to have been overcome with a compulsory purchase order.

The headmaster of Churchfield High School was Mr FW Lewis, who had moved with the school when it first transferred from the Technical College in 1948. Under his leadership the school instituted a system of separate school houses, namely Kenilworth, Stoneleigh, Warwick and Whitley. The school also had a sixth form which no doubt aimed to send some of its pupils into higher education.



Prize-giving at Churchfield High School in 1954, with head girl Claire Parkes (centre) and head boy Brian Sherrad. On the right is headmaster Mr Lewis with Councillor Binks, and on the left is Chairman of the Governors, Councillor Meffen, and the former headmistress of Barr's Hill, Miss Barrow, who presented the prizes.

At the school's first Speech Day in 1952, the headmaster said the school now had 450 pupils and had "excellent examination results." It participated in inter-school sports leagues, such as football and hockey, and had won the Coventry Schools' Cricket Cup for the second time in two years.

The school magazine ('Field Fare') mentioned outings to the Shakespeare theatre in Stratford, and visits to Cadbury's at Bournville and to Wembley for a women's international hockey match.

But despite its apparent success, Churchfield High School was not to remain long at Bray's Lane. Within a whirlwind of educational reform in Coventry, a large new purpose-built school was taking shape in the grounds of the old Whitley Abbey, and in 1955 many of the pupils at Churchfield, together with pupils from Cheylesmore School in Mile Lane, were transferred to the new Whitley Abbey School.



Pastures new: the open spaces, lake and modern blocks of Whitley Abbey Comprehensive.

Some pupils remained at Churchfield, which for a while became an annexe of Whitley Abbey, but by 1958 all students had moved to the new comprehensive school, where the first headmaster was Mr Lewis, who had moved with his pupils from Bray's Lane. When construction of the new school was complete, it was aiming to have space for 1,500 pupils, divided into separate houses.

The departure of pupils from Churchfield High School meant that, once again, the old house in Bray's Lane, together with adjoining buildings, became vacant. But the vacancy was soon filled, this time by pupils from

Three Spires School, under the tutorship of headmaster Mr John Price.

Three Spires was known as a 'special school' and was intended for pupils with learning difficulties. It was one of a number of Coventry schools at that time for children with special needs, some of which still exist. As a result of this change of use, it became clear that Elm Bank was no longer needed as part of the main school, so in 1959 it was decided that Bettmann's old house should become Coventry Teachers' Centre - a place for meetings, courses and social events for teachers.

It was during the tenure of Three Spires School, some 15 years later, that fire broke out at Bray's Lane.

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Despite the drama of the blaze, only one day's schooling was lost and tributes were paid to the "magnificent staff" who carried on teaching. But urgent repairs were required, with one wing of the building severely damaged, nine rooms lost, and parts of the roof missing.

When work was finally completed, the old Hope's Harbour was still there but barely recognisable. The distinctive tower at the front of the house was dismantled, the south wing was demolished and the roofline was remodelled.

Not long afterwards, in 1976, Three Spires moved out of the building to take up residence at another site –

Kingsbury Road in Coundon – and once again the much-altered building in Bray's Lane was looking for a new tenant. But it would not have to wait too long because another local school, Sacred Heart Junior



*A rear view of the building immediately after the fire in 1972, showing damage to the roof and upper floors. The wing on the far left is an extension to the original house, probably added in 1926. After the fire, the wing on the right was demolished and the roof realigned.
Photo courtesy of Rob Orland / Historic Coventry*



*This aerial view of the rear of the current school illustrates how much of the original building was lost after the fire.
Photo: Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham*

opening of Sacred Heart School at Bray's Lane. And head teacher Mr Terrence Carmody expressed his delight that the school had finally been able to vacate its tiny former home, where the school had begun in 1924.

Sacred Heart School celebrated its centenary in 2024 and still proudly occupies its 'new' site in Bray's Lane, as it has done for almost 50 years. □

Pictured right: the view from Bray's Lane, Sacred Heart School today

A brief history of the original Sacred Heart School in Harefield Road appeared in the June 2024 edition of Jabet's Ash, to coincide with the centenary.

Catholic School, was already waiting in the wings.

In 1977 the Birmingham Diocesan Commission arranged to spend a total of £96,000 on further conversion work to make the property suitable for the new occupant, including the provision of a new infants' block. Later that year Sacred Heart School gleefully moved to the building in Bray's Lane, leaving behind the cramped conditions of its old school in Harefield Road.

In July 1978 the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* reported that hundreds of children, parents and teachers packed the hall and corridors at the school to celebrate the official

