

'A hidden gem' – group visit to Midland Air Museum, Baginton

THE next outdoor event for Stoke Local History Group will be a visit to the Midland Air Museum at Baginton, which is brimming with displays, artefacts and information relating to Coventry's role in aviation history. Our visit takes place on the morning of Friday July 10th, beginning at 11am.

A highlight of the museum is the Frank Whittle Jet Heritage Centre which features, amongst other things, a gripping documentary film about the legendary jet engine inventor.

Exhibits elsewhere in the museum include an outdoor display of old aircraft, including a spectacular Vulcan bomber which might conjure up memories of an occasion in 2013 when the last working Vulcan made a low-level flight over Coventry to celebrate its 60th anniversary. For those nimble enough to do so, it should be possible to climb into the cockpit of the Vulcan.

Displays inside the museum include an abundance of material about Coventry firms involved in aviation history, as well as reminders of former aerodromes in Coventry, such as Whitley and Radford.



Photos: John Marshall



The small museum, which sits on the perimeter of the recently closed Coventry Airport, has stated that it will not be affected by the airport's closure. It occupies a plot of land not affected by current redevelopment plans and will remain open for visitors as usual.

One recent visitor described the museum as a "hidden gem" and many reviewers have expressed surprise at how much there is to see. The charge for admission is £11 per person, which includes a group guided tour. There should also be plenty of free time to explore at your own pace. There is a café for refreshments and a shop.

The museum is situated near Baginton village on Rowley Road and is clearly signposted, adjacent to the northern boundary of the airport, south of the A45. There is no direct bus service so it's best to travel by car. There is a large car park. The postcode for sat navs is CV3 4FR.

We need to let the museum know in advance how many people to expect. Please reserve your place before July 3rd by contacting John at stokehistorygroup@gmail.com.

Visit to Midland Air Museum. Friday July 10th, beginning at 11am.

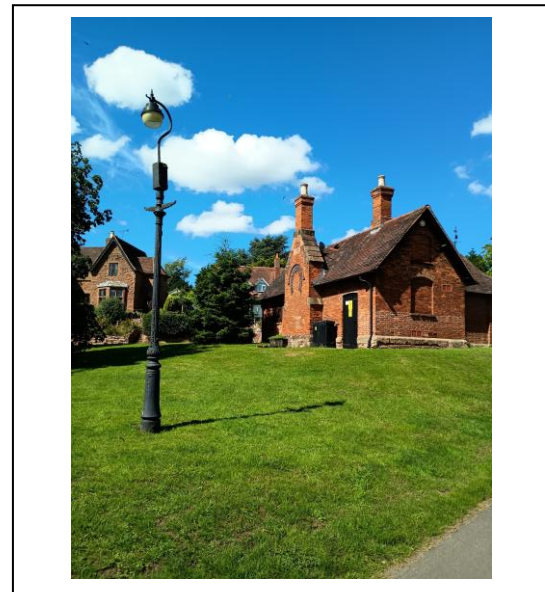
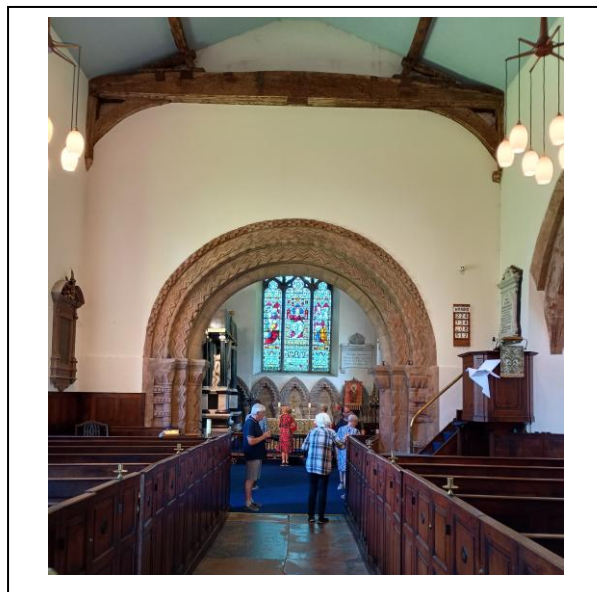
Advance booking required. Contact the history group to reserve a place.



As usual, Stoke Local History Group has been taking the opportunity to explore a few outdoor spaces during the early part of summer, including a visit to the endlessly absorbing London Road Cemetery where so many of Coventry's most notable characters are buried. In a guided walk with Ian Woolley, we were shown numerous graves of influential people, including (top right) the resting place of Charles Hathaway, the clever Works Manager at the early Triumph bicycle company, who was the subject of a talk at Stoke Library in March. His grave features a sliced column, indicating a life cut short. He died aged 51 and his son Sydney died during the First World War, aged 18. More recently we visited the village of Stoneleigh (pictures below) which was once at the centre of a vast estate owned by the Leigh family, including Stoneleigh Abbey, a former Cistercian monastery. The picturesque old village survives, and our guide Sheila Woolf treated us to a fabulous stroll on a gloriously sunny afternoon, concluding with a visit to the medieval church of St Mary the Virgin, with its stunning Norman arch.

Warm thanks to our guides.

Photos: John Marshall

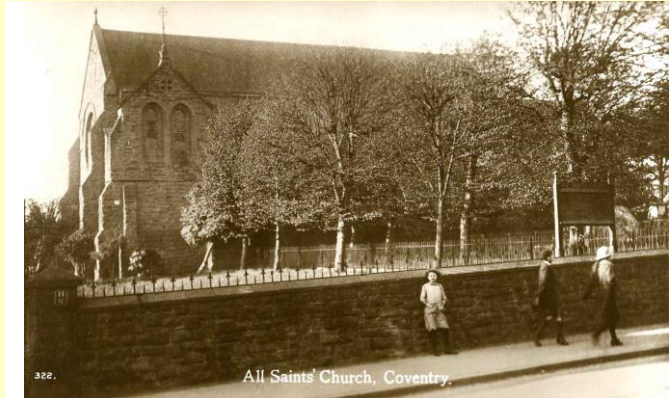


Far Gosford Street - whatever happened to All Saints Church?

IN the April edition of *Jabet's Ash* we observed that Joshua Perkins, the one-time owner of Stoke Cottage in Clay Lane, had previously lived in Far Gosford Street and was a worshipper at All Saints Church. But this church is no longer there.

What happened to All Saints Church? And where was it? A clue to its former location can easily be found on Far Gosford Street where an empty green space – looking remarkably like a churchyard – suddenly interrupts the continuous flow of buildings. This is the site of the old church, with its original stone wall still intact, together with a stone gateway.

All Saints Church began in May 1868 when its foundation stone was laid, with great masonic ceremony, by Lord Leigh of Stoneleigh, the Lord Lieutenant of Warwickshire. Unlikely as it might seem, Lord Leigh claimed to be using a mallet that had previously been used by King Charles II when laying the first stone of St Paul's Cathedral



All Saints Church, Far Gosford Street, c1926.
Photo courtesy David Fry



Today's former entrance to the church. Photo: John Marshall

in London. The mallet, explained Lord Leigh, had entered the ownership of a Masonic Lodge in London and had been brought to Coventry with great care for this ceremony at All Saints.

The church was consecrated in January 1869, at the same time as its sister church, St Mark's, next to Swanswell Pool in Stoney Stanton Road. Both churches were intended to meet the needs of a rapidly expanding city, whose labouring class had suffered greatly during the economic collapse of the 1860s. Both churches had a strikingly similar style, designed by architects Paull and Robinson of Manchester, and each had seating for 646 people.

All Saints was built in the Early English Gothic style, with locally quarried red sandstone and internal dressings in Bath Stone. There was no tower or spire, but a south-west bellcote had one bell.

The church consisted of an aisled and clerestoried nave, a chancel flanked by an organ chamber and a north chapel. The aisles were roofed with small transverse gables, one to each bay.

During its lifetime, many local people from Hillfields and Stoke would have been part of its congregation, especially before St Margaret's Church was built at Ball Hill in 1910. Both churches were extensively damaged during air raids in the Second World War but restoration work at All Saints was completed in 1950.

Among the many weddings held at All Saints during the post-war period, one notable example involved the marriage in 1965 of a Coventry City footballer, Brian Hill, who was an integral part of Jimmy Hill's Sky Blue revolution. The *Coventry Evening Telegraph* reported



An interior view of All Saints, c1889.
Photo courtesy David Fry

that Brian Hill would be marrying his bride, Margaret Barnes, at All Saints in the morning and then playing against Bury at Highfield Road in the afternoon.

By this time, however, the congregation at All Saints had dwindled and the future did not look bright. In August 1967 it was announced that the church would permanently close, the principal reason being a city council plan to build a new arterial road which, it was feared, would decimate the parish. It was also said that the 98-year-old church was in a poor state of repair.

The vicar, Rev A F Williams, said the first inroads into the parish were already being made by the next stages of the city's inner ring road, which at that time was still being built. "The development that really carves up the parish and leaves very little community at all is the Gosford Spur, which runs from the ring road by the Baths to a vast roundabout at the Gosford Street-Cox Street junction," he said.



*An early photograph of All Saints Church, c1889.
Photo: City Council conservation area team*



All Saints Church, pictured in c1970, shortly before its demolition. Note the distinctive round windows providing light to the clerestory level of the nave, and the gabled south aisle. The pollarded trees are still there today, now much larger and in full leaf. Photo: City Council conservation area team

"It will then go straight through All Saints School, which is to be rebuilt elsewhere, across Bramble Street, follow the line of Grafton Street and come up into Binley Road where it feeds on to the north-south urban motorway."

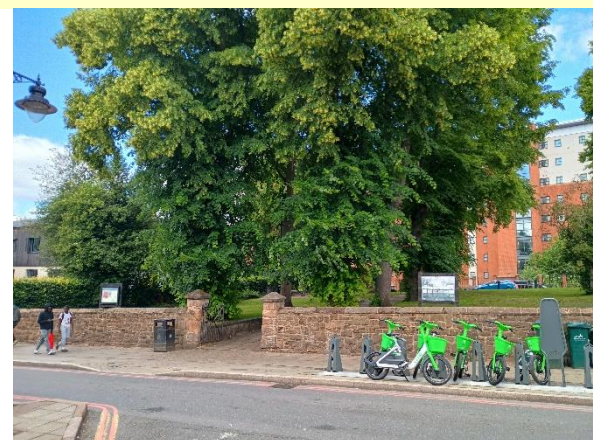
He added: "The north-south motorway along the railway embankment will lead to the demolition of the vicarage in Binley Road. This plan virtually wipes out All Saints parish."

Anne's in Acacia Avenue, and other parts merging with St Peter's in Hillfields.

The final wedding at All Saints took place on September 2nd, 1967, and the church closed for the last time after an evening service on the same weekend. The church was demolished in 1971, with parts of the parish merging with St

In the event, the feared road scheme did not materialise in quite the way it was first envisaged. Much of the original plan was later revised and it was not until the 1980s that Sky Blue Way was built - saving Far Gosford Street but still splitting the old All Saints parish. Buildings and streets to the south, including All Saints School and Bramble Street, also survived and the old school building still exists today as a nightclub. The north-south road took even longer to build and was not completed until 1997. It is now known as Jimmy Hill Way.

St Mark's Church, meanwhile, also closed in the early 1970s and it too faced the threat of demolition. But it was saved by the NHS which turned the building into an Outpatients Department for Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital. Against all the odds, it re-opened as a church in 2017. □ **JM**



*The site of All Saints Church today, a green space in a busy street, with Sky Blue Way behind.
Photo: John Marshall*