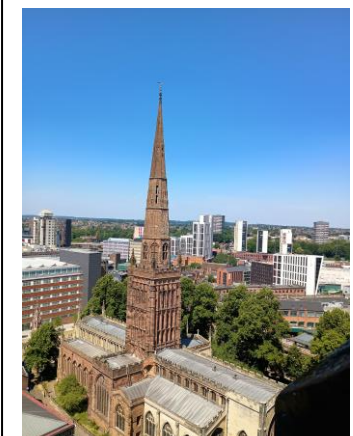
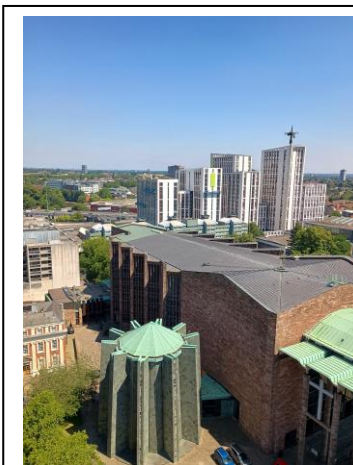


Climbing the Cathedral tower – for the best views of the city

THE skyline of Coventry city centre has seen some significant changes over the last decade or so, with numerous new high-rise buildings adding a new look to the city. And, as always, the best place to view what's changed is from the magnificent 14th century Cathedral tower.

The tower reopened in May after 18 months of restoration and now gives visitors the chance, once again, to climb its 180 steps. Coventry Cathedral says the reward is “a breathtaking 360-degree view from the rooftop of this Gothic masterpiece, the third highest cathedral in the UK – soaring over 100 metres high.”

The tower is open during the summer months on Saturdays and Sundays from 11am to 3pm. The charge is £5 for adults, with a discount for those with a Go CV card.



The old cathedral was largely built in the late 14th and early 15th centuries, with the tower added to the main structure by wealthy wool merchants and former mayors, William and Adam Botoner, between 1373 and 1394. In around 1433 the spire was begun, funded by two Botoner sisters, Mary and Anne.

Source: [Historic Coventry website](#)
Photos: John Marshall

Air Ambulance Service on the move

THE closure of Coventry Airport last month means that the local air ambulance service is obliged to find a new home. It is currently fundraising to build a new base at Catthorpe in Leicestershire, about 13 miles east of Coventry, but local services will remain at Baginton until the new base is built. The new base will become operational by summer 2027.



Images: Air Ambulance Service

The local service began in 2002 when former chairman Malcolm Hazel founded the charity under the name Warwickshire and Northamptonshire Air Ambulance Service. They began flying a helicopter leased from Sloane Helicopters, with dedicated doctors volunteering to crew the aircraft outside of their NHS shifts.

By 2007 the service was able to operate 365 days of the year and in 2008 it expanded its mission by taking over operations for the newly established Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Rutland Air Ambulance. These days,

the charity employs its own critical care paramedics.

In 2012 it launched the National Children's Air Ambulance – operating across the country - moving critically ill children between hospitals.

The site at Catthorpe has been chosen for a new base because of its strategic location. "The site is central to three of the counties served by the local air ambulance: Warwickshire, Northamptonshire and Leicestershire," the charity says. "It puts us within a short flight of the people who need us. The design of the new base will also help the National Children's Air Ambulance get in the air faster when responding to a time-critical children's transfer."



The charity, which receives no government or NHS funding, says it needs to raise £9 million to build its new base at Catthorpe. An artist's impression of the new building is shown above. Further details about the charity and its fundraising appeal can be found online at [About us - The Air Ambulance Service](#)

Speeding offence – not guilty

I ONCE lived in a house in Villiers Street, Stoke.

When doing research on the original development of Villiers Street and the surrounding area (see *Jabet's Ash*, May 2026) I came across an interesting snippet (right) in the *Coventry Recorder*, dated 3 October 1908. Well, it seemed interesting to me at any rate... It concerned a resident of Villiers Street, namely John Marshall, who was convicted of speeding on the Kenilworth Road. All in a good cause, apparently.

Just for the record, I want to make it clear that this was not me. Honest... I didn't have a car in 1908. Still don't.

John Marshall, editor Jabet's Ash

EXCEEDING THE SPEED LIMIT.
John Marshall, motor driver, Villiers Street, Coventry, was summoned for driving a motor-car at a speed exceeding twenty miles an hour on the Kenilworth Road on September 10.
Defendant pleaded guilty, and P.s. Fielding said he timed the defendant's car and it travelled at thirty miles an hour.
Defendant said he had a gentleman in his car who had broken his ankle and he was anxious to get him home as quick as he could. He did not break the law for any purpose of his own.
The Chairman said they did not consider it a bad case, and he would be fined 10s. and costs, £1 15s. in all.

The buildings of James Murray – Coventry's finest Victorian architect

THE life of James Murray was tragically short – he was not quite 32 when he died in 1863 – but during his brief but busy career he became one of the most admired architects of the period, being responsible for some of the finest buildings in Victorian Coventry.

He embraced the 'Gothic revival' school of architecture, fashionable at the time, and designed a number of public buildings which changed the face of Coventry during the 1850s and 60s.

His buildings in Coventry included the Corn Exchange in Hertford Street, the School of Art in Ford Street, a new Baptist Church in Hay Lane, St Michael's Parish Schools, the Cash brothers' cottage factory in Foleshill, and the Blue Coat School in Priory Row. He also enlarged Stoke St Michael's Church and was the architect of numerous buildings in Warwickshire and other parts of the country.

The Corn Exchange

DESPITE his reputation for Gothic architecture, Murray's grandest building in Coventry was probably the classically inspired Corn Exchange in Hertford Street, an Italianate design in a Palladian style. The building opened in 1856 and was intended as both an indoor market for trading grain and as "a hall for meetings and balls".



In December 1857 Charles Dickens gave a

performance at the hall of his novel *A Christmas Carol*, having been invited to do so by Coventry MP Joseph Paxton. The building became a favoured place for concerts, public meetings and events. In 1906 the Exchange was redesigned as the Empire Theatre and was the first in Coventry to show films. A fire destroyed much of the building in 1931 but it reopened in 1933 as a modern cinema with seating for over 1,500 people. Further damage was done during the Blitz but the building - much changed - continued to thrive as a cinema during the immediate post-war years (pictured left). The central columns remained intact but much of the original facade had been lost. The building permanently closed in 1971 and was demolished soon after.



Coventry School of Art

THE need for a school of art and design was prompted initially by the ribbon and watch making trades which required a suitable place for vocational training in Coventry. Having outgrown its previous premises, a new School of Art was opened in Ford Street in 1863. It was designed by Murray in what was described as the Venetian Gothic style, made popular by the writings of John Ruskin. It was damaged during the Blitz and was unused after 1959. It was later demolished to make way for the ring road.



St Michael's Baptist Church



ST MICHAEL'S Baptist Church was created when part of the congregation of Cow Lane Chapel decided to split from their home chapel and build their own church. The new church, designed by Murray, was built on the corner of Hay Lane and Bayley Lane - the first non-conformist chapel in Coventry to be constructed in the Gothic style. The foundation stone was laid on October 9th 1856 and was followed by a dinner at the new Corn Exchange, attended by Joseph Paxton. The elaborate church opened in 1858 and featured buttressed stone walls, stained glass windows and a small tower with a spire.

The church was completely destroyed during the air raids of 1940. A replacement church was built later at Quinton Park, Cheylesmore, opening in 1957.

Blue Coat School

THE old Blue Coat School was founded in the early 18th century as a place to educate poor girls, mostly orphans, who would be trained for domestic service. The school was built on part of the ruins of St Mary's Priory Cathedral and by the 1850s the foundations had become unstable. James Murray was asked to rebuild the school and he designed the building in an elegant Gothic style, reminiscent of a French château. Work began in 1856 and was completed the following year. At around the same time Murray restored and extended Lychgate Cottages in Priory Row, which had been acquired by the Blue Coat Charity in 1855.



Blue Coat School endured the Blitz and is one of the few surviving buildings by Murray in Coventry.

Cash's cottage factory



AT the end of 1856 Murray placed one of his familiar advertisements in the local newspapers, asking builders to submit tenders for his latest project, in this case the construction of about "One Hundred Weavers' Tenements" on a site known as King's Fields, near Foleshill. This was to become the famous 'cottage factory' weaving complex, commissioned by the Quaker brothers John and Joseph Cash. It consisted of rows of weavers' cottages, above which were individual 'top shops' with Jacquard looms, powered across the row by a

shared driveshaft and steam engine. It was a way of utilising the advantages of a factory system whilst allowing weavers to maintain their independence.

In the event, the scheme was crippled by the collapse of the weaving trade in 1860 and was never fully realised. Only 46 cottages were built, in two blocks, but the whole brick-built complex has considerable architectural distinction. It still exists and is Grade II listed. □ **JM**

Postcard photographs courtesy of Rob Orland