

Cathedral marks 75th anniversary of Basil Spence design

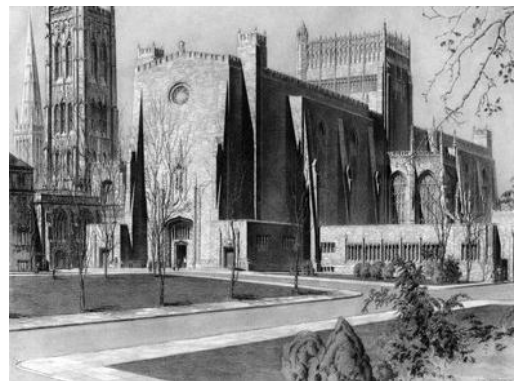
It is 75 years since the public discovered that Basil Spence had won a competition to design the new Coventry Cathedral.

To mark the anniversary, the Cathedral is staging an exhibition of some of the entries that were unsuccessful when designs were submitted by architects in 1950-51.

Giles Gilbert Scott had initially been asked to design the new Cathedral but his ideas led to years of disagreement before his proposals were finally rejected in 1947. He envisaged a design that fused the traditional with the



modern, with the new nave overlapping the ruins of the old Cathedral. The design provoked a fiercely contested debate about the future of church architecture, and a competition was seen as the best way to settle the matter.



Giles Gilbert Scott's design for the new Coventry Cathedral, with a traditional exterior (above) and a dramatically modern interior (left).

Images: RIBA Collections

The competition to design the new Coventry Cathedral was launched in October 1950, attracting 219 entries. Those entries were eventually reduced to shortlist of 15 before Spence was declared as the winner.

Harry Foley, the curator of this anniversary display, has described the original competition as “a battleground for ideas, between traditional and more modern styles, with many attempting to mix the two. Ultimately this became a triumph for modernism, opening the door for other modern designs that would come to define much of Britain’s church architecture of the late 1950s and 1960s.”



Image: RIBA Collections

A number of alternative designs are highlighted in this exhibition, including the one by William Beswick, pictured on the left. Another design was by Colin St John Wilson, who later co-designed the new British Library at St Pancras.

The display takes place in the Chapel of Industry at Coventry Cathedral and is open for viewing until September 21st. Opening hours are 10-4pm, Monday to Saturday, and 12 noon-3pm, Sunday. Admission is free. □

James Murray's almshouse in Stoneleigh village

IN last month's *Jabet's Ash* we looked at several buildings in Coventry designed by the prolific Victorian architect James Murray. Sadly, some of those buildings failed to survive the ravages of the Second World War (or the ring road), but Murray's buildings are quite likely to pop up in other places.



Photos: John Marshall



One such building is the second almshouse in Stoneleigh (pictured above), which some of us saw on our recent group visit to the village. This imposing building, designed by Murray, is said to have been commissioned by Margarette Leigh, in memory of her husband Lord Chandos Leigh, who died in 1850. Although it might look like a single residence, it was originally designed as four separate dwellings, to accommodate four widows.

A timeline compiled by the Stoneleigh History Society states that it was built in 1855, presumably to complement the older almshouses by The Green (pictured left), first built in 1594.

Sheila Woolf of the Stoneleigh group told us that Lady Leigh was not best pleased with Murray's building, which she likened to a French château. It was this building, perhaps, that inspired elements of Murray's impressive design for the Blue Coat School in Coventry, constructed a year later.

Anyone wishing to know a little more about James Murray's short life is recommended to see an article by Peter Walters - *'James Murray - Coventry's Virile Gothic Architect'* - published by the Coventry Society in 2018 and available online. □

Back issues of *Jabet's Ash*

A REMINDER that all back issues of the newsletter are available to view online. You can find them on Rob Orland's excellent Historic Coventry website (historicc Coventry.co.uk). Go to the website and select the Stoke section, then look for Stoke Local History Group. Or you can just do a Google search for 'Historic Coventry Stoke'.

All issues of the newsletter - going back to the first edition in 2020 - are available. Rob also provides a useful summary of the contents of each issue, together with an invaluable search box if you're looking for something specific.

The website also contains an encyclopaedia of information and discussion about the history of Coventry. □

Jabet's Ash

The newsletter of Stoke Local History Group, Coventry August 2023

New Coventry Cross unveiled in city centre

A NEWLY rebuilt Coventry Cross was officially unveiled in the centre of the city last month, located on the edge of the city centre, between Primark and Holy Trinity Church.

The cross is based on a 1976 replica of the famous 16th century cross, and tells the story of Coventry's growth as an important medieval market town.

The new version, located close to the original site of the Tudor cross at Cross Chipping, features a series of stained glass windows which recall the history of the cross and the role played in the city's history by Henry VI and his queen, Margaret of Anjou.

The monument stands 60 feet tall and contains 33 statues of animals, angels, saints and kings. In the centre is a remarkable 30-pointed sculpture of King Henry VI, based on the original Tudor statue.

The new cross is a rebuild of a 1976 replica which once stood at the site of the original cross.

What is the connection between Coventry's famous Tudor cross and the parish of Stoke? See article on page 3-4.

Heritage Open Days, September

Stoke Local History Group has no event this month because we take our usual summer break in August and September. But there will be an exchange of activities next month for those with an interest in history and heritage. Coventry's Heritage Open Days begin on Friday September 8th and continue until Sunday September 17th. Take a look at the Heritage Open Days in London Road Coventry, visit Stoke's Castle at Baginbun, take a tour of Henry VIII School or visit the King's Field Orchard in Stoke. Numerous other places are also open. Search online for 'Coventry Heritage Open Days'. Stoke Local History Group will return to Stoke Library in October.

Heritage Open Days - Coventry's annual celebration of city's cultural landmarks

MANY of Coventry's most significant historic buildings and places will be open again in September as part of a free nationwide heritage festival.

Heritage Open Days provide a rare opportunity for local residents and visitors to see a number of hidden spaces that are not normally open to the public. And they also provide free entry to heritage attractions that usually charge for admission.

Events this year run from September 11th- 20th and it's all completely free, though advance booking is sometimes required.

A selection of highlights include:

Coventry Council House tours



A chance to explore the private rooms at the Council House not usually open to the public, including the Lord Mayor's Reception Suite and the Hospitality Suite. Also open to view are the Council Chamber and Basement. Visitors can also see some of the artefacts and paintings of old Coventry which adorn some of the walls.

Open Sat-Sun 12-13 Sept., Sat-Sun 19-20 Sept., 10-4pm



Priory Undercrofts – film and photography

An exhibition will be held in the Priory Undercrofts – part of the new LTB Showrooms Arts & Music facility on the site of Coventry's old Priory Cathedral of St Mary. The exhibition will feature photographs from Elizabeth Tyler's photo archive, showing unusual images of the city in the mid-1960s. This will be complemented by an exhibition of photographs by the Jaguar Photographic Club. There will also be a special screening of Bernard Rayner's cine film (40 minutes' duration, looped), documenting the construction of Coventry Cathedral during 1957-60. Various days from Fri Sept 11th to Sat Sept 19th. See Heritage Open Days website for details.



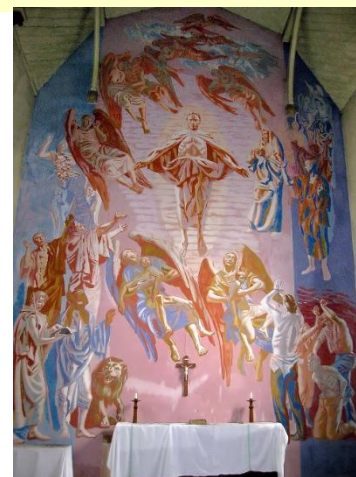
Coombe Abbey Hotel and Park



The hotel promises a guided tour with one of its resident monks, who will tell stories about the building's history, from the very beginning when it was a monastery to tales of the gunpowder plot and much more. The walk will be followed by tea and a scone with clotted cream in a private dining area. Tours take place on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, Sept 18th-20th, at 11am, 1pm and 3pm. See the Coventry Heritage Open Days website for booking information. Guided tours of the Abbey Park are also available on Sept 19th. Pre-booking is required for both the Hotel and the Park tours.

St Mark's Church, Swanswell

A chance to visit St Mark's Church on Stoney Stanton Road (next to Swanswell Pool), the sister church of All Saints, once located in Far Gosford Street (see *Jabet's Ash* June 2026). The design of the church is similar to All Saints and will give visitors an opportunity to judge what All Saints might have looked like. But St Mark's also has a unique feature – a full height mural painted by Hans Feibusch, the distinguished Jewish émigré who fled from the Nazis in 1933. He became particularly known in England for church murals and some of his work is displayed in Chichester Cathedral. The mural in Coventry was hidden behind a partition wall for many years when St Mark's became an Outpatients Department for the NHS. It remained hidden when the NHS moved out. St Mark's is open for Heritage Open Days on Saturday September 12th, from 10am-3pm.



Albany Theatre backstage tours



This is an opportunity to gain backstage access to The Albany, an art deco theatre built in the 1930s. Hear the story of the building, from its origins as a college lecture hall to its role in World War II and its present-day use as a theatre. Local historian Adam Wood, well known to members of Stoke Local History Group, will take visitors on a 30-minute tour of the building, explaining key moments in the history of the building and the surrounding area. The tours take place on two mornings: Sunday Sept 13th and Saturday Sept 19th, with time slots each day at 10am, 11am, 12 noon. Pre-booking is required. Check Heritage Open Days website for booking details or contact the Albany Box Office.

Allesley Park Walled Garden



Allesley Park Walled Garden Group was formed in 1997 to recreate a kitchen garden as it might have looked 235 years ago when John Neale, Lord of the Manor and owner of Allesley Hall, started to grow his own vegetables, fruit and flowers. You can visit the current Walled Garden as part of Heritage Open Days on Sunday Sept 13th, 11am to 4pm. The Walled Garden Group promises short talks with visuals on a large screen throughout the day, featuring newspaper proprietor William Isaac Iliffe who purchased the hall and its lands. Advance booking is not required. Check Heritage Open Days website for location details.

A great many other heritage attractions are available to view during Heritage Open Days, including St Mary's Guildhall, Charterhouse, the City Gates and London Road Cemetery. Always check details on the website before setting off. Enjoy!

