

Looking at two 19th century artists - David Gee and Nathaniel Troughton

OUR first meeting at Stoke Library after the recent summer break will focus attention on two Coventry artists who captured some inspiring images of the city and its buildings in the days before photography became widespread.

Local historians David Fry and Elizabeth Yardley will talk about artists David Gee and Nathaniel Troughton, two Coventry men who lived remarkably parallel lives – both being born in the 1790s and both surviving into their seventies.

Gee is perhaps best known to modern readers for his association with the Doom painting in Holy Trinity Church, which he restored in 1831. The painting attracted widespread publicity in 2004 when the work was restored again, revealing some of its original 15th century features. But Gee is also well known for his own Coventry paintings, especially those featuring the Godiva Procession and St Michael's Church.



Haymaking in Coventry by David Gee.



Hay Lane by Nathaniel Troughton.

Images: Herbert Art Gallery

By contrast, Nathaniel Troughton was better known for his pencil drawings, many of which featured medieval street scenes and buildings which were later lost as the city changed. He was a distinguished surgeon and did drawings in his spare time, producing what the Herbert Art Gallery described as “eleven portfolios of beautiful pencil drawings, some of which are in colour”.

The life and work of these two artists will be briefly explored through two illustrated talks at Stoke Library on Friday October 2nd, starting at 10.30am.

● *Just before the talks begin we will take a few minutes to consider the group's Annual Report and elect (or re-elect) a steering group for the year ahead. See page 2.*

Stoke Local History Group, Friday October 2nd, starting 10.30am, Stoke Library

David Fry and Elizabeth Yardley talk about two 19th century artists

David Gee and Nathaniel Troughton

Annual Report, 2026, Stoke Local History Group

THERE's been no single theme for the various talks and events that have taken place over the past year for Stoke Local History Group. Instead, we've had an immensely varied programme of events – with many different talks, walks and visits. This Annual Report is an opportunity to look back at what's been achieved - and look forward to what's to come.

The closest we came to a theme was in October and November when memories of the Coventry Blitz were uppermost in our minds. Chris West spoke about his mother's memories of the Blitz and the enduring impact it had on the rest of her life. This was followed, logically enough, by David Fry talking about the trailblazing influence of architects Donald Gibson and Arthur Ling, who did so much to rebuild a city that had been torn apart by bombs.



*Rebuilding a city: a tale of two architects, Broadgate in 1955.
Postcard courtesy Rob Orland*

Before that, in October last year, local crime historian Adam Wood told the tale of an IRA bomb attack in pre-war Broadgate, which killed five people in August 1939 - just nine days before the Second World War began.



*Reflections on
Coventry-born
poet Philip Larkin*

A more literary tone followed in February this year when Sheila Woolf reflected on the poetry of Coventry-born Philip Larkin and the impact the city had on his life.

Locally, the Triumph bicycle and motor bike company has always been a central interest, if only because its famous founder, Siegfried Bettmann, was a long-time resident of Stoke Park. In March we heard about Triumph's clever and influential Works Manager, Charles Hathaway, and his son Sydney Hathaway, who both had their lives cut tragically short. Our speakers on that occasion were local historian Nigel Clews and Stoke favourite David Fry.

Our series of talks were rounded off in April when Dean Nelson presented a lively and popular film show, with numerous snippets of film depicting a wide range of material relating to old Coventry.

Outdoor events during the early summer included a walking tour of London Road Cemetery with Ian Woolley, a group visit to historic Stoneleigh with Sheila Woolf, and a visit to the Midland Air Museum at Baginton.

Alongside these meetings and events, a newsletter, *Jabet's Ash*, has continued to be produced each month by John Marshall. We offer our thanks, as usual, to the staff of Stoke Library for their continued support. And warm thanks, too, to all our guest speakers and walking tour guides.

A new series of talks is already being planned for the year ahead, kicking off with a slide show presentation about two significant Coventry artists of the 19th century (see front page), and in November a talk about George Eliot's Coventry.

Our AGM takes place on Friday October 2nd, before the talk by David Fry and Elizabeth Yardley. The AGM is expected to be a brief formality, the main task being to elect or re-elect a steering group for the year ahead. Please get in touch if you would like to join the steering group.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY: Future meetings at Stoke Library will be held on Friday October 2nd; November 6th; December 4th; February 5th; March 5th; and April 16th. There will be no meeting in January. The April date is later than usual to avoid a clash with school holidays.

Taking a walk down Bray's Lane, in picture postcards

IT'S usually acknowledged that the lower end of Bray's Lane, near the junction with Binley Road, is more picturesque than the top end, near the Walsgrave Road junction. It is for this reason, perhaps, that old picture postcards of the lower end of the road have always been more popular and more frequently seen.

Picture postcards of the top end of the lane are rarer, or at least less familiar. But they tell a tale that is just as interesting as any other part of the road, perhaps even more so because they're rarely seen.

We begin our journey down Bray's Lane with a postcard (right) showing the top end of the road, next to Walsgrave Road in 1913.

The most noticeable thing about this image is the semi-detached houses at the far end of the picture, on the corner of Walsgrave Road and Clay Lane. These houses today are shops but, like most of the properties on Walsgrave Road, they were not originally designed as shops. Only gradually did owners turn their front parlours into shops, eventually creating a major suburban shopping centre.



On the right of the picture above are hedges and trees, and this area can be seen more clearly in our next postcard (below), looking in the opposite direction.



The area to the left in this picture has an interesting history, marked in part by industrial use, garden allotments, and an old row of cottages known as Field Row.

Belonging to an era when Stoke was primarily rural, Field Row was a collection of eighteen cottages which stretched diagonally across this land, adjacent to Bray's Lane. The end building is just visible here

in this picture, in the distance on the left of the road. But Field Row can best be viewed on a map, which we'll see shortly on the next page.

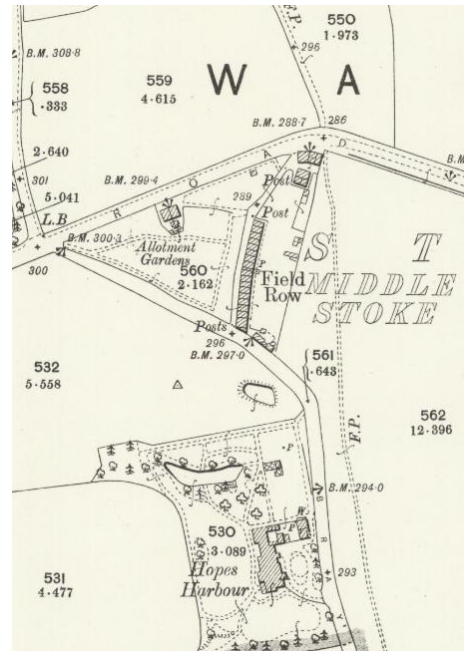
The most notable occupant of Field Row was a man called George Holt, who had a small factory at the end of the Row where he manufactured clay tobacco pipes. It appears that the business had first been established on the corner of Barras Lane and Spon Street, where a factory with two kilns was owned by a man named Taylor. The factory was removed in the mid-19th century, possibly after Mr Taylor died, and

was rebuilt at Field Row in Stoke, where Mrs Taylor conducted the business for a few years longer. It was then acquired by John Holt, whose son succeeded him, and clay pipes continued to be made at the factory until George Holt died in 1915.

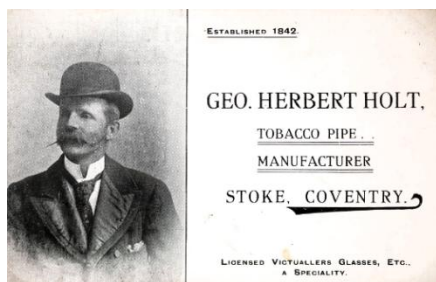
According to an article in the *Coventry Standard* (30 April 1915) Mr Holt sold his pipes over a wide area, “especially in the north-eastern part of Warwickshire where miners still smoked clay pipes in considerable numbers”.

The map (right) shows where Bray’s Lane meets Walsgrave Road in 1903, with allotment gardens occupying part of the space behind Field Row.

The rented cottages in Field Row were probably small, although they often provided accommodation for large families. In 1912 a resident called George Price was summonsed for failing to comply with an order to avoid overcrowding. It was said that the defendant, his wife and six children (the eldest age 14) occupied one bedroom. He was fined 20 shillings.



Another Field Row resident, Richard Jones, a haulier, was frequently fined for allowing his horse to stray. In 1921 he was fined five shillings after his horse was found in Much Park Street after straying from Stoke Common. Numerous similar fines would follow.



The space at the junction of Bray’s Lane and Walsgrave Road was later occupied by a factory producing leather trimmings for the motor trade. It was here in 1947 that a large fire broke out, causing extensive damage to the factory and badly scorching the houses in Field Row, where some of the windows were blown out.

Moving along Bray’s Lane we arrive next at more familiar houses (below left) which still exist today. The house pictured here is part of an impressive series of semi-detached villas which helped to

transform Bray’s Lane from a quiet country lane (see map, above) to a relatively busy suburban road during a building boom from 1909 to 1915. These villas stood almost opposite a large property, Harefield House (originally Hope’s Harbour), and the design of the new houses was clearly intended to complement the grandeur of their neighbour.

Our final photograph (below right) probably captures the essence of Bray’s Lane as we know it today. This postcard dates to 1913 and shows the old Parish Rooms and Institute (now used for kick boxing) and the houses close to Binley Road. On the left of the picture is the imposing stone wall of Stoke Park. □ **JM**



All picture postcards courtesy of David Fry