

# Stoke Local History Group

Newsletter September 2020



## All change at Far Gosford Street

A new residential development for students is to be built in Far Gosford Street, next to the existing



Callice Court building (now known as Calcott Ten). The new complex, with retail shops on the ground floor, will provide 60 student apartments and will replace the current Kebab Rush takeaway (pictured) which will be demolished. Two new blocks will be built, with the front block containing 28 apartments across five storeys and the rear block containing 32 apartments across seven storeys.

In a planning statement to Coventry City Council, the developer said: “The proposal seeks to create a high-quality design development which replaces the existing low quality architecture on the site. The new development will use modern construction methods and has been designed to harmonise with the existing streetscape...” It is reported that a Section 106 agreement is in place, providing £94,250 to upgrade local green space, likely to be used at Primrose Hill Park and Gosford Green.

# The Empire moves on

Another recent change in Far Gosford Street has seen the demise of The Empire, a vibrant music venue which has moved to larger premises in the city centre.



The new Empire now occupies a building at the top of Hertford Street - formerly home to the Cannon and ABC Cinemas but more recently JJB Sports and DW Sports.

The Far Gosford Street building will be remembered by some as the old Paris Cinema but the history of the picture house goes back to 1912 when it first opened as the Crown Theatre. It initially had seating for 558 people but this was soon extended to 771 seats.



In 1925 it was taken over by Oscar Deutsch – his first cinema – who later built up the Odeon chain. It only remained under his control for a brief period and was sold as a going concern in 1928. It was forced to close temporarily in October 1940 after air raid damage.

***In October 1957 the cinema closed again for modernisation and when it reopened in March 1958 it was renamed as the Paris Luxury Continental Cinema, later shortened to Paris Cinema.*** The first film at the reopening starred Eva Bartok in 'Her Crime Was Love', with the star appearing in person.

After several openings and closures over the years, the Paris finally closed for good in November 1981.

The building lay derelict for a number of years but in 1999 it reopened as Riley's American Pool & Snooker Club. When the club eventually closed it was transformed into The Empire, a popular music venue operated by local man Phil Rooney. When Mr Rooney's lease ended he decided to move to the vacant building in Hertford Street – once the site of a post-war Empire Cinema.



Coventry Live reported in April that the empty building in Far Gosford Street is likely to be demolished.

● *The new Empire was expected to open this summer but progress has been curtailed by the continuing coronavirus crisis. See the Empire's website for updates.*

# Renaissance-style building survives

Far Gosford Street contains a variety of interesting buildings from different periods of history, including the impressive Calcott Brothers office block which dates back to 1896.



*Calcott Building today (above) and a vintage 1916 Calcott car (below)*

The building is probably best known as the former home of Astleys, the supplier of paint, industrial clothing, PPE, tools and hygiene equipment, which moved to a site at Coventry Business Park about fifteen years ago. But the original building was designed for the Calcott Brothers, cycle and car manufacturers. The building was saved when construction began on new student residences in 2006, and it now offers a handsome frontage to the student accommodation.

A plaque on the front of the building contains the following inscription:



***Calcott Bros and West were established in 1885 and opened from three sites before moving here in 1896 as Calcott Bros. The firm originally manufactured cycles, the 'XL' being its best known. In 1913 Calcott produced their first car and introduced the famous 'Ten' (10hp) a year later. A 1921 cabriolet version can be seen in the Coventry Transport Museum...***

***The ailing Calcott was taken over by Singer in 1926. Astleys acquired the premises just before the Second World War. This well-known Coventry firm***

***originally traded as rope, canvas and paint manufacturers. Only the Renaissance-style office block now survives (1896), designed by E J Purnell. Most of the workshops at the rear were demolished to make way for student accommodation (2006-2007).***

## Freddie issues a warning



The legendary Freddie Mercury seemed to make a surprise appearance in Far Gosford Street during the current health crisis. Peering from the window of Noise Works, the music shop, Freddie issued a not-too-subtle

warning about the importance of using face masks during the coronavirus pandemic.

To the tune of Queen's famous anthem 'We Will Rock You', the message in the window says:

**'No mask on your face  
You big disgrace  
Spreading your germs all over the place'**

*All colour photographs of Far Gosford Street: John Marshall*



This photograph of Far Gosford Street dates back to 1912 and shows the changing face of the street. The building on the right is probably best known to local residents today as the former home of Lloyds Bank but in 1903 it was part of the Coronet car factory. The site was taken over by Humber in 1906 but a fire destroyed the works and in 1908 the company moved to their new premises in Humber Road. Although damaged in the fire, the old office block remained intact and by 1912 the ground floor frontage had been converted into shops, as shown here. □