

Stoke Local History Group

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THE latest event for Stoke Local History Group, on December 3rd, was an intriguing exploration of Coventry Canal Basin.

Ten members of the group joined tour guide Phil Tutchings to discover the origins and purpose of the canal, the character of Drapers Fields, and the later industrial heritage of the canalside, represented especially by the Daimler works and the nearby power station.

There was an added bonus when Brian Barker, a resident of Stoke Park, invited members of the group to take a look inside the Riley Archive, a unit at the Canal Basin dedicated to savouring the memory of the old Coventry car maker.



Exploring Coventry Canal Basin

Photos: John Marshall



Phil Tutchings -who runs a 'walks and talks' venture called *In Godiva's Footsteps* – explained that the Coventry Canal was built by local colliery owners and opened in 1769, with James Brindley as the first engineer. Brindley's vision was to link the Mersey, Humber, Severn and Thames together with a national network of canals, serving the needs of the emerging industrial revolution. Coventry Canal was central to the network – linking the Trent & Mersey to the Oxford Canal. Phil also talked about some of the local pubs in the area and you can find his observations in a recent blog on his website, entitled 'Bare Knuckles, Music and Murder'. See www.godivasfootsteps.com.

Future plans...

The emergence of the Omicron variant of Covid has clearly thrown another spanner in the works when it comes to resuming normal activities of the history group. Like many other community groups, we're in limbo at present. In these circumstances it seems increasingly unlikely that indoor meetings can be resumed at the library or at any other venue in the immediate future. We usually take a break in early January because most people will still be engaged with Christmas and New Year activities. So our next scheduled event would normally be early February. We will wait to see how things develop and will hope to organise something – possibly another outdoor event – if this is a viable option. Watch this space. Happy Christmas!



The Riley Archive at the Canal Basin is usually open on Wednesdays and one other weekday but check first if you wish to visit by phoning 024 7509 5299.

Your antidote to panel games

IF, by any remote chance, you become tired of endless celebrity panel games, old comedy specials, *Strictly Coming Dancing* or *Blankety Blank*, there's an alternative close to hand during the Christmas and New Year period, courtesy of television on-demand. It's an ideal opportunity to catch up on all those interesting programmes you might have missed during the year. Here's a sample:



Britain's Most Historic Towns (C4): This brilliant series has been airing on Channel Four since 2018 and is presented by the excellent Alice Roberts. Series 1-3 are available on DVD but you can still catch up on numerous TV episodes, including Elizabethan Plymouth, Georgian Edinburgh, the age of steam in Glasgow and an exceptional episode about the industrial revolution in Manchester.

Villages by the Sea (BBC): Presented by archaeologist Ben Robinson, this series explores some fascinating coastal villages that have often been on the front line of history. Currently available to view are a selection of surprising stories about Alnmouth and Bamburgh (Northumberland), Arnside (Cumbria), Staithes (N Yorkshire), Thorpeness (Suffolk) and Charlestown (Cornwall).

The Architecture the Railways Built (Yesterday): This is an absorbing documentary series, presented by the amiable Tim Dunn, who explores railway sites across Britain and Europe, including quirky or glorious old railway stations, amazing civil engineering, and the occasional modernist masterpiece which breathes new life into the railway system. An amazing jaunt through railway and social history. Tim Dunn's enthusiasm is infectious.

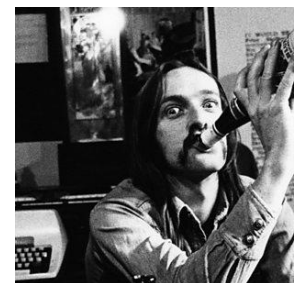


Classic British Cars: Made in Coventry (BBC): A passionate retrospective about the city's motoring history, with local boy Mark Evans telling the story of classic cars made in Coventry, including the Daimler, Triumph, Riley and Jaguar. Essential viewing if you missed it first time round.



2-Tone: The Sound of Coventry (BBC): Another essential catch-up. This is a gripping documentary about the rise of 2-Tone in Coventry, and it provides a fascinating insight into the social history of the period. Contains a rare interview with 2-Tone founder Jerry Dammers, together with memories from other influential characters such as Pauline Black, Neville Staple, Neol Davies and music mogul Pete Waterman.

Lindisfarne's Geordie Genius: the Alan Hull Story (BBC): This is an enthralling story, well told, about a sometimes neglected aspect of musical history on Tyneside. Sam Fender explores the career of his hero Alan Hull, the sadly departed creative force behind the original Lindisfarne. Hull was the writer of their most successful songs in the 1970s, such as *Lady Eleanor* and *Fog on the Tyne*, and he continued to write classic songs until his early death in 1995.



Freddie Mercury: The Final Act (BBC): Another musical theme but this programme throws light on the 1980s and early 1990s, recalling the untimely death of Queen frontman Freddie Mercury whose story is movingly told. The value of this documentary is that it concentrates not just on Freddie Mercury but also on other individuals who were crushed by the Aids pandemic, in a decade shamefully soured by homophobic intolerance. The programme includes interviews with doctors and activists, and features some uplifting music, including the 1992 tribute concert at Wembley. □