

Stoke Local History Group

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A History of Stoke in Old Picture Postcards

STOKE Local History Group will return to Stoke Library next month, after an absence of two years. But numbers will be restricted and booking is required.

The group's last meeting at the library was in March 2020 when Eleanor Nesbitt gave a talk about Coventry's literary connections. Since then our programme of activities has been severely restricted by Covid lockdowns and constraints.

But we return to the library on Friday March 4th, starting at 10.30am. John Marshall and David Fry will present a slide show entitled 'A History of Stoke in Old Picture Postcards'.

Safety concerns will remain a priority and numbers will be limited. **BOOKING IS ESSENTIAL.**

Library regulations mean that an effort should be made to maintain social distancing, masks should be worn, and people are recommended to take a lateral flow test before attending.

Places can be booked by emailing John at stokehistorygroup@gmail.com.



City Archives to highlight Caludon Castle



Ruins of Caludon Castle today

Photo: John Marshall

AN exhibition at City Archives will highlight the history of Caludon Castle, the former fortified manor house in Wyken once owned by some of the most powerful families in England.

The small display at the Archives will unearth the history of the castle and will show its connections with royalty and Shakespeare. It will also include an opportunity for the first time to view "the historic Caludon Archives, on loan to the History Centre by kind permission of Lord Clifford of Chudleigh whose ancestors were Lords of the Manor of Caludon." These priceless documents go back to the 1200s. Also on display for the first time will be a reconstruction of Caludon Castle as it was in the late 16th century under ownership of the Berkeley family.

The reconstructed model was created by Peter Garbett and has been loaned to the Archive by John Clarke, publisher of the book *A History of Caludon Castle: The Lords of the Manor of Caludon*.

The exhibition begins on March 30th at the History Centre, within the Herbert Art Gallery building, and will run until May 21st. Please note the opening hours of the History Centre are limited to Wednesday to Friday (10.30am to 3.30pm) and alternate Saturdays (same hours). Admission is free.

Ball Hill buses in 1914 - pioneers in city fleet

MARCH 1914 was a significant year for public transport in Coventry, when the corporation launched an impressive range of Maudslay double-decker buses.

Residents of Ball Hill and Upper Stoke were the first to benefit from these buses and our wonderful photographs evoke the pioneering spirit of the period. But any sign of civic pride was destined to be short-lived because these state-of-the-art buses were withdrawn from service and requisitioned by the army at the outbreak of World War One - only months after their first appearance.



It was the Coventry Corporation Act of 1913 that gave the authority new powers to operate buses and the local company Maudslay was chosen to manufacture the city's first fleet. Maudslay continued to produce the city's buses until 1932 when a new transport manager at Coventry Corporation changed allegiance to another local company, Daimler, which supplied many of the later buses.

The Maudslay company had started at Parkside in 1902, at first producing motor cars but later shifting exclusively to commercial lorries and buses. In 1928 the firm opened an

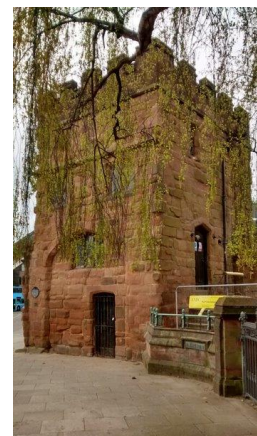
The first Coventry bus service, from the city centre to Stoke Heath, began in 1914 using six locally made Maudslay vehicles. They were open top double deckers with solid tyres, no windscreen and seats for 34 passengers. Photos courtesy of David Fry

additional factory off Allesley Old Road in Coventry, at a site that became known as Maudslay Road, opposite The Maudslay pub. In 1948 the company was absorbed into the AEC group and soon lost its separate identity.

COVENTRY'S only remaining city gates, Swanswell and Cook Street, have been restored by Historic Coventry Trust and are now offering luxury studio-apartment accommodation to visitors.

Cook Street Gate is thought to have been built around 1385 and was given to the city by then owner Colonel Wyley in 1913. Swanswell Gate (pictured right) was completed a little later and was then known as Priory Gate, having originally served as the entrance to the prior's land. This gate, says the Trust, "was converted into a cottage in the mid-19th century, and has subsequently been used as a shop, an artist's studio and a hub for West Midlands police. Both gates were restored in the early 20th century by city philanthropist Alfred Herbert, who also created the surrounding garden in memory of his second wife, Florence."

The gates have now been removed from Historic England's 'Heritage At Risk Register'.



Spotlight on Far Gosford Street

FAR GOSFORD STREET predates Coventry's medieval city wall and goes back to at least the 12th century.

Construction of the city wall is said to have started in 1356 and most accounts suggest that it took 41 years to complete, though its final form was probably not complete until 1534, some 178 years after it began. The wall had twelve gates, one of which was Gosford Gate, which stood at the bottom of Far Gosford Street, next to the River Sherbourne. It was the second gate to be built.

The construction of the city wall meant that Far Gosford Street was placed firmly outside the city, effectively a medieval suburb, an alternative society where artisans were free of the restrictions inside the wall. The name Far Gosford Street emphasises the street's separateness from Gosford Street, which was inside the wall, though this separate sense of identity was already evident before the wall was built.



Gosford Gate

Far Gosford Street was the principal route into Coventry from Leicester and the east. The name Gosford Street refers to the old "goose ford", a crossing over the river where the passage of farm animals towards the old town markets would have been a familiar sight.



An image of Far Gosford Street by Coventry artist Herbert Edward Cox

In front of Gosford Gate was a bridge over the River Sherbourne, with another bridge over Springfield Brook to the east. It is said that King Charles I tried and failed to enter the city here in 1642 in one of the earliest skirmishes of the English Civil War.

Metalworkers and locksmiths dominated the street in the 13th century but weavers and drapers were more prominent in the 14th and 15th centuries. "Coventry was one of the most prosperous cities in England during the late medieval period," says the Far Gosford

Street website. "At this time the street was crammed with a variety of trades and crafts, most notably of the woollen industry, including weaving, wool combing, dyeing and fulling – the cleaning and thickening of cloth."

Many medieval buildings survive in the street, a number of which were restored during a major regeneration project from 2005 onwards. A series of plaques along the street provide a fascinating glimpse into the occupations of former tenants.

By the late 18th and early 19th centuries the main industry in the street was the silk and ribbon weaving trade, with many residents living and working in the same buildings. This is illustrated by those houses with living accommodation on the first two floors and a workshop on the upper floor. Such buildings are generally known as "topshops" and a restored terrace of this type can be found at 67-72 Far Gosford Street. The ground floors of these buildings were only later converted into shops.

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Rapid growth of the city meant that many workers were forced into densely constructed courts - tiny houses built at right-angles to the main streets and entered through passageways from the street fronts. Far Gosford Street had many such courts, with primitive houses and an outside toilet shared by many families. They were regarded as slums and were mostly demolished in the 1960s.

Pubs in the street include the Gosford Arms, previously known as the Pitt's Head, which once stabled horses for events taking place at a nearby racecourse. The pub was also the venue for less salubrious activities such as bareknuckle fighting.



Tour guide Phil Tutchings (above and below) explains the principal features of Far Gosford Street during February's history group tour. Restored 'topshops' are clearly visible in this picture (above).
Photo: John Marshall



Photo: Charles Barker

The moral welfare of the community was in the hands of a church, All Saints, which opened in 1869 and was able to seat up to 750 worshippers. Education was provided at the nearby church school. The old churchyard still exists but the church itself was demolished in the 1970s. The school building survives as a nightclub.

During the early years of the 20th century the street was also home to two cinemas, the Scala and the Paris, the remains of the latter surviving until recent times as the Empire concert venue. The Scala, which first opened in 1912, was hit by a bomb during the Blitz of November 1940 and five people died. It was re-named the Odeon in 1950 but closed in 1963. After a spell as a bingo hall it was damaged by fire and demolished in 1973.

The cycle and motor car industries also had an impact on the street, and surviving buildings include the old Humber office building at the top of the street and the former Calcott Building near the site of old Gosford Gate.

John Marshall

□ For further information about the Humber and Calcott buildings, plus an article about the Empire and the Paris cinema, see the history group newsletter, September 2020. More details about Far Gosford Street can be found on the Historic Coventry website and the street's own website (fargosfordstreet.com). Valuable publications include the *Far Gosford Street Conservation Area Appraisal*, published by the city council in 2013, and a very useful little booklet, *Far Gosford Street Heritage Visitor Guide*.



Restored buildings in Far Gosford Street

Photo: Historic Coventry website