

# Stoke Local History Group

## Newsletter April 2022

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Newsletter editor: John Marshall



### Caludon Castle talk

OUR next meeting at Stoke Library will take place on Friday May 6<sup>th</sup> and will feature a talk by Phil Tutchings about the history of Caludon Castle – a long-forgotten feature of Coventry which is only now receiving the proper attention it deserves, thanks in part to the current exhibition of rare manuscripts and artefacts at City Archives.

The meeting at Stoke Library begins at 10.30am and will be preceded, briefly, by the group's AGM. Numbers are still restricted and booking is essential. The wearing of face masks is still recommended. Anyone wishing to book can do so by emailing John at [stokehistorygroup@gmail.com](mailto:stokehistorygroup@gmail.com).

**COVENTRY Cathedral is currently exhibiting a small collection of work by the sculptor Jacob Epstein, best known these days, perhaps, for his monumental sculpture 'St Michael and the Devil' which forms a prominent and instantly recognisable feature of Coventry's modern cathedral.**

The exhibition brings together a number of sculptures by Epstein whose work was plagued by controversy during his lifetime. Responses to his work during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century represent an interesting case study in changing social attitudes towards art, religion, sexuality and depictions of the human body.

Epstein was born in the Lower East Side of New York in 1880, part of a Jewish family that had emigrated from Poland in the 1860s. He moved to Europe in 1902, settling in London in 1905 and becoming a British citizen in 1911.

An enormous furore erupted in 1908 when 18 large sculptured figures by Epstein, some of them nude, were unveiled on the facade of the British Medical Association Building in the Strand. They were intended to represent the ages of man, from birth to old age, but were considered shocking by Edwardian standards. The

London Evening Standard fanned the flames when taking exception to depictions of nudity and pregnancy.

His second major commission, a statute for Oscar Wilde's tomb in Paris, also faced accusations of indecency.

His reputation was dogged by such controversies and his work provoked a prurient interest from the public, who were keen to view anything regarded as salacious. Between the late 1930s and the mid-1950s, a number of sculptures by Epstein were exhibited in sensational 'adults-only' shows on Blackpool promenade, where crowds paid a shilling to view his work. The sculptures, which included 'Jacob and the Angel', ended up being displayed as curiosities in Louis Tussaud's waxworks in Blackpool, before being 'rescued' by Lord Harewood.

Later in the post-war period a more mature response to Epstein's work prevailed and he received a number of major commissions, including the statue of 'St Michael and the Devil', completed in 1958 and unveiled at Coventry Cathedral in 1961. Epstein died in 1959. The current exhibition, which includes a number of works in different parts of the building, runs until May 31<sup>st</sup>. □



'Jacob and the Angel'

Photo: John Marshall

# Weaver's House re-opens for the summer



THE superbly restored cottage of weaver John Croke in Upper Spon Street has opened for the first time this year and will have a series of similar Open Days during the summer.

The Weaver's House is part of a terrace of six cottages built in 1455 by Coventry Priory and rented out to weavers or dyers, who supplied cloth to the priory.

The cottages have seen many changes over the years, both internally and externally, but by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the terrace was severely dilapidated and declared no longer fit for human habitation.

The Spon End Building Preservation Trust was created in the 1990s and embarked on a three-phase restoration project, with the

support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage and Coventry City Council.

One phase of the project involved the transformation of one of the cottages into the current Weaver's House, a conversion which restored its original medieval appearance and re-created the cottage into what it would have looked like when occupied by narrow-loom weaver John Croke and his family in 1540.

At the rear of the house is a medieval garden, showing plants that would have been grown for food, flavouring, medicine and household use. The team from *The Great British Dig* used the garden last year to film scenes for their episode about Biggin Hall in Stoke, to illustrate the type of food that would have been grown at that time. The Weaver's House is run by well-informed and friendly volunteers who provide visitors with a fascinating glimpse into the life of a poor weaver's family in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Further Open Days this year will be held on May 7<sup>th</sup>, June 11<sup>th</sup>, July 9<sup>th</sup>, and August 13<sup>th</sup>.



Photos: John Marshall

## Author talk on June 10<sup>th</sup> – Adam Wood

ON Friday June 10<sup>th</sup> our guest speaker at Stoke Local History Group will be Adam Wood, author of *The Watchmaker's Revenge*. His new book, *The Case of the Painted Bicycle Lamp*, tells the story of two murders in Stoke Park in 1906 and will be published in late June. More details next month.

Note the change of date for this meeting. The first Friday of the month, our usual meeting time, is a Bank Holiday for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee so our meeting has moved forward by one week, to June 10<sup>th</sup>. This means that our July meeting will also move forward to Friday July 8<sup>th</sup>. As usual, there will be no meetings during the summer holidays in August and September.

# Stoke's most famous moment in history – September 1398

IT'S been described as "the greatest occasion of chivalry in medieval England" and it happened right here in Stoke, Coventry, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1398.

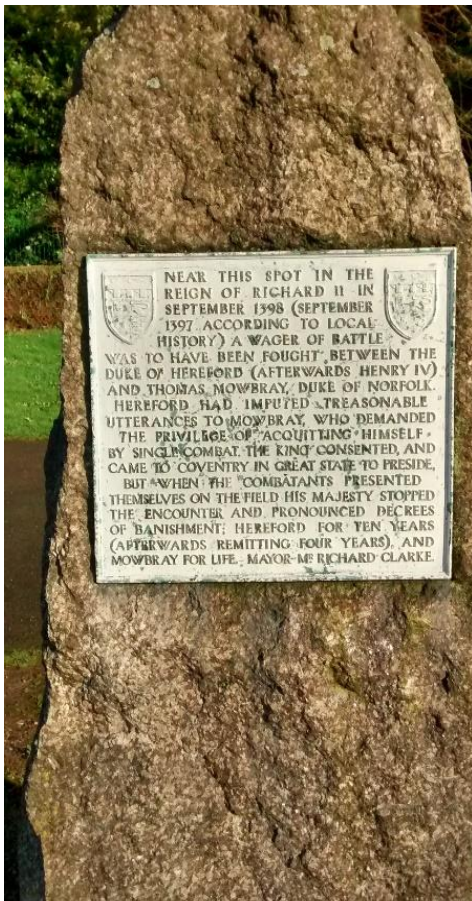
On this day a great duel was set to take place at Gosford Green in Coventry, where two of the country's most powerful nobles, Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, and Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford, would stage a trial by combat.

The two men had each accused the other of treason and King Richard II decided that the dispute could only be settled by armed conflict, a duel to the death on horseback. He who survived would be declared innocent.



*A stained-glass window in Stoke St Michael's Church depicts the moment when King Richard II halted the duel at Gosford Green*

*Photograph: John Marshall*



The event was overseen by the King himself who rode to Coventry with his entire royal household and, it is said, up to 10,000 armoured men. Knights and nobles flocked to the site from all over England, joining the humbler townsfolk of Coventry.

It is believed that a tent for the King was erected in a spot on the slope of the hill, near the current Old Ball pub. Mowbray is said to have spent the night before the duel at Caludon Castle, a home acquired by his family over forty years before. Bolingbroke stayed at Bagot's Castle, the home of Sir William Bagot at Baginton.

We are told that Bolingbroke was mounted on a huge white charger, decorated with blue and green velvet, embroidered with gold swans and antelopes. Mowbray was no less resplendent, on a steed decorated with red velvet, embroidered with silver lions and mulberry leaves.

The two knights faced each other, primed for battle, and the spectators waited in breathless anticipation. But just as the nobles were about to charge, the King appeared on the platform overlooking the combat site and threw down his baton. The duel was halted.

For two hours Bolingbroke and Mowbray sat on their restive mounts while the king deliberated in his tent. When he re-appeared, without any explanation, he sentenced both men to

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exile, Bolingbroke for ten years, Mowbray for life. No noble blood was to be spilled on Gosford Green that day.

Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford, was ordered to leave the realm within 15 days and told not to return for ten years unless the King ordered it. He was given an annual income of £2,000 but all his lands were confiscated. Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, was banished for life, having been found guilty of sowing the seeds of sedition with his words.

**That might have been the end of the story but what followed would change the course of English history.**

King Richard's initial response in the aftermath of the combat appeared to be conciliatory. Following pleas from Henry's father, John of Gaunt, the King agreed to reduce Bolingbroke's banishment to six years. But this crumb of comfort was to change dramatically when John of Gaunt died in 1399.

Richard's reaction was to seize John of Gaunt's lavish estate – the Duchy of Lancaster – and to increase Henry's banishment to life.

Angered by this perceived injustice, Henry Bolingbroke, now also Duke of Lancaster, returned to England to reclaim his rightful inheritance. With the assistance of powerful allies such as Henry Percy, Duke of Northumberland, Bolingbroke launched an offensive against the King who was captured and taken to London,



*King Richard II, the son of Edward, the Black Prince, inherited the throne at the age of ten in 1377*

where he was imprisoned in the Tower and forced to abdicate in September 1399.

Richard II died a few months later, at Pontefract Castle in Yorkshire, with a strong suspicion that he was murdered on Bolingbroke's instructions - in all probability by starving. After the King's abdication and death, Bolingbroke claimed the throne for himself and became Henry IV, thus sowing the seeds of future wrangles and fierce dynastic conflicts that would later become known as the Wars of the Roses.



*Gosford Green today, where details of the duel are recorded on a plaque*  
Photos: John Marshall

The episode at Gosford Green in 1398 can therefore be seen as the first link in a chain that would have far reaching consequences in the history of England. The story forms part of the plot of Shakespeare's play *Richard II* and is remembered locally not just by a monument on Gosford Green but by a series of local street names, such as King Richard Street, Mowbray Street, Bolingbroke Road, and Kingsway. A plot of former allotments, almost hidden these days beside the old railway embankment (now a roadway), is called King's Fields, another reference to King Richard II. Those fields would once have been much larger, incorporating the spot where the King slept before that fateful day at Gosford Green.

John Marshall  
John Hudson

## **Volgograd decision change**

COVENTRY City Council has reversed an earlier decision to retain its historic twinning link with Volgograd, following the invasion of Ukraine by Putin's Russia. A letter has been sent to Volgograd explaining that the link has now been suspended as a protest against the Russian government and as a show of support for the people of Ukraine. The letter expresses hope for a time in the future when the relationship can be rebuilt. □