

# Stoke Local History Group

COVENTRY

## Newsletter December 2022

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editor John Marshall

### Blue plaque unveiled on Philip Larkin's birthplace

THE Coventry Society has placed a blue plaque on the early childhood home of poet Philip Larkin, who spent the first years of his life at 2 Poultny Road, Coventry.

Larkin was born at the house in Radford on 9 August 1922 and lived there until he was five, when his family moved to Manor Road, near the railway station. The Manor Road house was demolished in the 1960s.

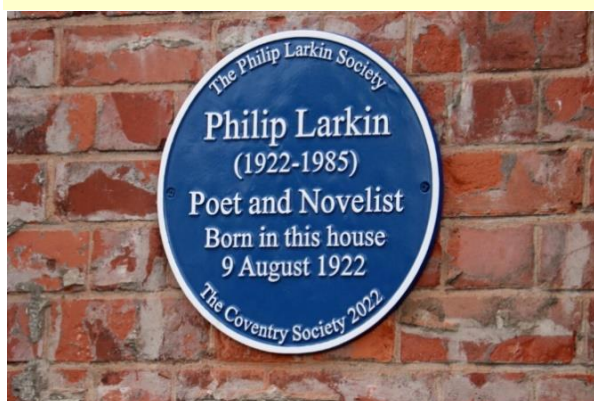
Philip Larkin was the younger child and only son of Eva Larkin and her husband Sydney, a man of strong views who was City Treasurer in Coventry from 1922 until 1944. The young Larkin attended King Henry VIII School and then St John's College, Oxford, before emerging as one of the most important English poets of the twentieth century.

The recent centenary of the poet's birth was widely celebrated with events around the country, particularly in Hull where Larkin spent most of his working life as the University Librarian. In 2010 his adopted city of Hull even unveiled a statue of Larkin, which occupies a prominent position within its railway station. But Larkin has traditionally been less well celebrated in his home city of Coventry, apart from the naming of a pub in his honour in 2017.



*Lord Mayor Kevin Maton unveils the plaque at Larkin's birthplace.*

*Photos: John Payne*



The Coventry Society was keen to rectify this neglect and the placing of a plaque at his birthplace in Poultny Road was enthusiastically backed by the Philip Larkin Society, which made a contribution towards the cost.

The blue plaque was formally unveiled by the Lord Mayor of Coventry, Kevin Maton, who said: "I'm delighted to be here because it's very important that the people of Coventry know more about their history and the talented people that their city has produced."

Speaking at the unveiling, Philip Pullen, an academic at Hull University and a member of the Philip Larkin Society, said: "The Larkin Society has wanted to put a plaque on his birthplace for many years and we're very grateful to the Coventry Society for finally achieving this."

Philip Larkin was offered, but declined, the position of Poet Laureate in 1984, the year before he died. Over thirty years later a floor stone memorial for Larkin was unveiled at Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

Peter Walters, chair of the Coventry Society, said: "I've long felt that in Coventry we do not do enough to celebrate Philip Larkin and his genius. This is just another small step towards making that happen."



BALL HILL remains an important landmark in Stoke and has played a key role for many years in sustaining the identity and vitality of the area. But there's a widespread feeling that Ball Hill has lost some of its zing in recent years and is not looking its best. That's why the Coventry community charity Grapevine is currently working with local residents and shopkeepers to improve the appearance of the area and enhance its reputation. Anyone wishing to be involved with the project is invited to get in touch with the group by emailing: [connectingforgood@grapevinecovandwarks.org](mailto:connectingforgood@grapevinecovandwarks.org) Our magnificent photograph above shows a Maudslay bus travelling down Ball Hill towards Gosford Green in 1914. The houses on the left, built in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, were designed as fine suburban villas and would have been occupied by relatively affluent professional families.

*Photo: courtesy of David Fry*

***PLANS to transform the historic Chace Hotel on London Road into a care home have now been abandoned, according to a health care charity. The hotel closed its doors for the final time in December 2021 and ambitious plans were drawn up to turn the building into a mental health care home (see newsletter, August 2022). But current economic conditions have now forced developers to step back from the plan. In an update to local residents, Cllr Roger Bailey quoted a statement from Deborah Stephenson, Associate Director of Accommodation Services***



***for the charity Rethink Mental Health, who said a decision had been taken not to pursue the project. "Given the rising costs due to high inflation and increased interest rates, the project is no longer viable and would not be value for money," she said. Surveys of the building, she added, had identified numerous issues, including the need to demolish part of the building, which would have added considerably to the original cost base. The development partners, she confirmed "will be withdrawing the planning application".***

**STOKE Local History Group, as usual, will take a break during the Christmas/New Year period so our next meeting will take place at Stoke Library on FRIDAY FEBRUARY 3<sup>rd</sup> 2023. Details in the next newsletter.**