

A tale of two gates (and a garden)

THE next meeting of Stoke Local History Group will feature a slide show presentation about a hugely challenging project to restore Coventry's two surviving city gates - Cook Street and Swanswell - and turn them into unique holiday accommodation for visitors to the city.

Our guest speaker will be Francesca Marsland, the Heritage Engagement Coordinator for Historic Coventry Trust, who will present a brief history of the medieval city walls and explain how the Trust has transformed the surviving gates and endeavoured to put new life into the adjoining Lady Herbert's Garden. The presentation will build on a previous talk to the group by Graham Tait, Assistant Director of Historic Coventry Trust, who gave us a general overview of the Trust's work in December last year.

Cook Street Gate and Swanswell Gate are the last remaining two of the original twelve gates that once punctuated Coventry's medieval city walls. The original project to create the city walls began in 1356



Cook Street Gate in 1910



Swanswell Gate in 1907.

Photographs courtesy of David Fry

when Mayor Richard de Stoke laid the first stone for the building of New Gate. The

wall was completed in 1397, though the route was later amended and its final form was not finished until 1534.

Cook Street Gate was built in 1385 and Swanswell Gate (also known as Priory Gate) was completed in 1440. A slightly more elaborate gate, Gosford Gate, provided an entrance to the city from the adjoining old settlement of Far Gosford Street and the nearby rural district of Stoke.

The city wall famously kept King Charles I at bay during the English Civil War but was later destroyed on the orders of his father, Charles II, after the monarchy was restored.

During the 1930s local industrialist Sir Alfred Herbert laid out the grounds of Lady Herbert's Garden, in memory of his late wife Florence, and this area forms a link between the two surviving gates, with a section of the old city wall still intact within the garden.

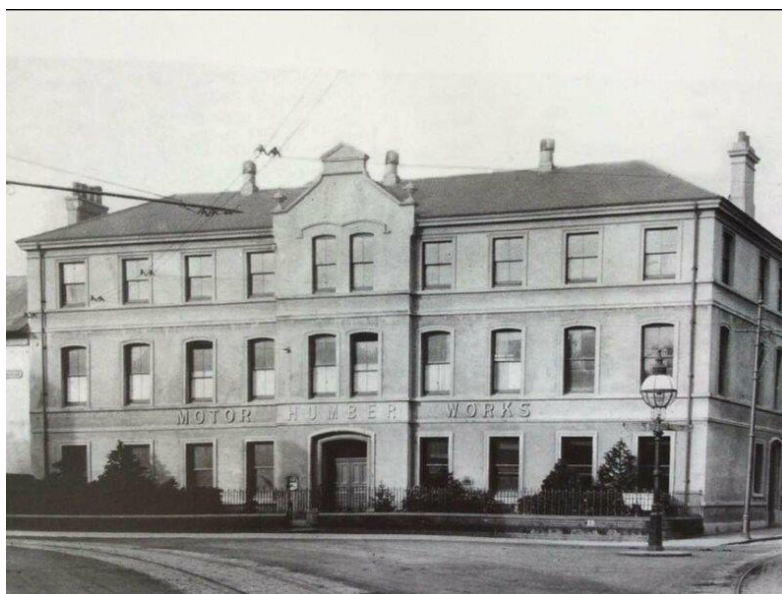
The meeting takes place at Stoke Library on Friday April 14th, beginning at 10.30am.

Former Coronet and Humber Works gain 'local listing' status

A LANDMARK building at the top of Far Gosford Street has been designated for Local Listing by Coventry City Council.

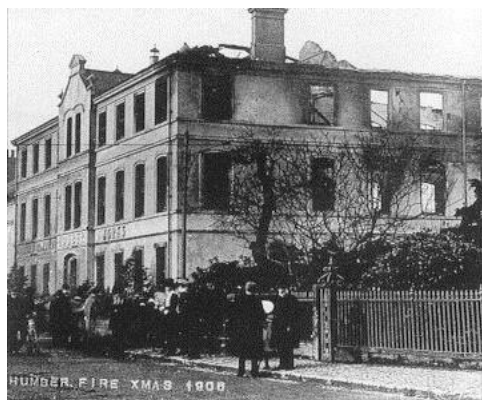
The building, known to many as the former Lloyd's Bank, was built in about 1898 and has played a key role in the development of the city's motoring history.

It was home to a number of early motor manufacturers who took workshop units in a substantial space at the rear of the present building. In 1903 it was known as the Coronet car factory but the most famous occupant of the site was Humber. But Humber moved



The Humber Motor Works, Far Gosford Street, circa 1905

out after a fire destroyed much of the building in 1906. They opened new premises in Folly Lane in 1908, later renamed Humber Road, and this massive new development did much to spur the residential growth of Stoke.



Fire destroyed parts of the building in 1906

Meanwhile, the surviving building in Far Gosford Street was altered in 1912 when a new frontage was added at ground floor level and it became a row of shops. By this time, many motoring marques had ceased trading and the building became a bank branch in the 1920s, remaining a branch of Lloyd's until its closure in 2016.

Local listing does not guarantee that the building will be protected from future development but it does mean that the heritage status of the building will have to be taken into account when any changes are proposed. A council report said the structure "sits beside a number of locally listed buildings and is seen to make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area", adding that it "contributes to the understanding of Coventry's rich motor industry heritage" and "plays a key role in the identity of Far Gosford Street." It was decided not to list the former Paris Cinema building (The Empire) at the other end of the street.

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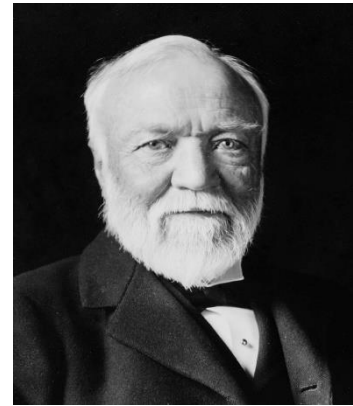
Shops were added to the frontage in around 1912.

Charterhouse set to open

A MAJOR restoration of Charterhouse, Coventry's former Carthusian monastery, is now complete and this significant heritage attraction is set to open to visitors on April 1st, says Historic Coventry Trust. A group visit by Stoke Local History Group is pencilled in for May but we await confirmation of a definite date, which should be clarified by next month.

Andrew Carnegie's celebrated visit to Coventry, June 1914

ON the morning of June 4th 1914, the city of Coventry was preparing to receive a very distinguished visitor. A train soon to arrive at the station would carry the world famous Scottish-American steel magnate, Mr Andrew Carnegie, who had been invited to Coventry to receive the Honorary Freedom of the City - the highest accolade the city could bestow.



The train accordingly arrived at 10.30am and Mr Carnegie was met by the Mayor, Siegfried Bettmann, and other civic dignitaries who warmly welcomed the visitor with a cordial exchange of greetings, according to the *Midland Daily Telegraph*.

Mr Carnegie's visit had been prompted by his gift of £10,000 to the city which had allowed Coventry to build its first branch libraries: at Stoke, Earlsdon and Foleshill. The branches had been officially opened in the previous year by Alderman Wyley and were already serving those rapidly expanding suburbs.

Onlookers applauded Mr Carnegie as he was driven first to Earlsdon Library, then Foleshill, before returning to the centre of the city where he was shown St Michael's Church (it was not yet a cathedral), St Mary's Hall and finally the Central Free Library, the latter located next to Holy Trinity Church and gifted to the city by an earlier benefactor, John Gulson. A visit to Stoke Library would follow, after which Andrew Carnegie was treated to a luncheon at the Mayor's house, Elm Bank in Stoke Park.



Andrew Carnegie arrives at Stoke Library. Pictured (left to right), Mr Pitt (City Librarian), Mr Poynton (Carnegie's Secretary), the Mayor, Councillor Bettmann, and in the car Mr Carnegie with the Deputy Mayor, Alderman Wyley, plus the chauffeur. Photo courtesy of Stoke Library

The pleasure of the tour was enhanced, the newspapers said, by the delightful weather that prevailed. But the main business of the day was to take place in the afternoon, when a formal ceremony was held before a large gathering at St Mary's Hall, where the celebrity guest received the Honorary Freedom of the City.

The story of Carnegie's life and work – a classic tale of rags to riches - would have been well-known to his audience, as was his benevolence and philanthropy. He was

born in Dunfermline, Scotland, in 1835, the son of a weaver who hit on hard times and emigrated with his family to Pittsburgh in 1848. The young Andrew, aged just 12 when he first arrived in America, worked as a factory hand, a telegraph boy, and a railway clerk before eventually forming his own company which grew into the largest iron and steel works in the USA. He retired in 1901, a multimillionaire, and lived at Skibo Castle in Scotland, as well as a mansion in New York.

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*Carnegie's New York home, opposite Central Park.
Photo: John Marshall*

There was some disquiet during his working life about the treatment of employees during industrial disputes at the steel works but, once retired, Carnegie's reputation was richly enhanced.

Much of his fortune was given away, including substantial gifts for the building of public libraries in both Britain and the USA. He also gave financial support to universities and to a variety of public institutions. Gifts during his lifetime are thought to have amounted to over 350 million dollars, a huge amount in today's values.

He was also a passionate anti-war advocate - something he mentioned during his Coventry speech - and in 1910 he

gave 10 million dollars to establish the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He also funded the Peace Palace at The Hague, originally built to house the Permanent Court of Arbitration.

After speeches were made at St Mary's Hall and formalities concluded, Mr Carnegie was asked by a reporter for his impressions of the city. He replied: "What do I think of Coventry? I am delighted. I find a community here that began and established a great Central Library many years ago, and has maintained it ever since. One of its most prominent citizens, Mr Gulson, gave it as a gift and built it in his lifetime, which is the test of real benevolence.



Local boys in Stoke keep a watchful eye on the visitor. Photo courtesy of Stoke Library

"I find here a busy, thriving industrial community, well

behaved, making a great record in manufacturing the best of anything it lays its hands on. Few places make life for the masses as agreeable as Coventry. The Coventry stamp is of inestimable value, both for its manufacturers and for its citizens."

And what did he think about the new branch libraries he had visited? "The new libraries are perfect," he enthused. "They are up to the highest standard. We have developed the perfect library in America, and I am astonished to find here that so has Coventry. Your Librarian, a young gentleman from Glasgow [Mr Septimus Pitt], has proved a model."

Before departing from the city, he added: "I find also that the mass of the people of Coventry are kind to each other, all proud of their own city. I have been reading an account of Coventry, which has now, I find, 126,000 inhabitants. It is not so long since it did not have half that number, and I predict that it has not done growing."

Andrew Carnegie was escorted from St Mary's Hall and left Coventry, making his way to Lincoln.

Just three weeks later, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated and this set forth a chain of events, leading to the outbreak of World War One. Carnegie was devastated by these developments and became a near recluse, barely stirring again until peace was re-established. He died in Lenox, Massachusetts, in August 1919, at the age of 83.

John Marshall