

Lanchester visit June 28th

A REMINDER that our next event is a group visit to Lanchester Archives at Coventry University. This takes place on Wednesday June 28, starting at 2pm. Meet at the entrance to the strikingly modern Lanchester Library in Gosford Street, or inside the café beside the entrance. Paul Nolan will come down to collect us at 2pm. He also promises to have a classic Lanchester car on display outside. There is no need to book. Just turn up! Pictured here is a Lanchester car on display outside the Lanchester



Library during this month's spectacular Coventry MotoFest.

Photo: John Marshall

History group event in July: a visit to Coventry's unique Watch Museum in Spon Street



AT the end of July, members of Stoke Local History Group are invited to the Watch Museum in Spon Street. Our group visit will take place on Saturday July 29, beginning at 11am. There is no need to book. Just turn up! The admission charge will be just £2 per person.

The Watch Museum is a hidden gem, occupying part of an old Coventry court, probably the last example of what was once a common type of dwelling in 18th and 19th century Coventry (see last month's newsletter for an article about Coventry courts). A museum was established here after the property was purchased by the Watch Museum Project in 2002.

The museum uses the ground floor of the court building and a newer prefabricated metal building for the display of watches, photographs, artefacts and equipment used by watchmakers. Visitors can also see some traditional outside toilets in the court and a building that is sometimes said to have been used as an air raid shelter during World War Two.

Spon Street was part of an important watchmaking district and the famous Rotherhams clock and watch factory was located nearby. Historically, the city of Coventry was a significant centre of watchmaking in England, with the main period being between the 1740s to around 1920. Several thousand people worked in the industry and by 1899 Rotherhams was a major employer, with 400-500 employees, plus about 200 outworkers, producing 100 watches per day. □

Stoke group's visit to Charterhouse



THE remains of Coventry's wonderfully restored 14th century Carthusian monastery, Charterhouse, finally opened on April 1st and Stoke Local History Group was honoured to be the first group to visit in May, following a decade of fund-raising and restoration.

We were treated to a fascinating guided walk through the existing buildings and grounds with David Mahony, lead architect for the restoration, who expertly revealed the history of the site, together with details of some of the challenges faced in the restoration (see April's newsletter for an overview of Charterhouse's history).

Special thanks to David Mahony, plus manager Hannah Jones and the Charterhouse team for their generous hospitality.

Charterhouse is open Thursday to Sunday, 10am-4pm. It is also open on Bank Holiday Mondays. An adult ticket costs £9 (£8 with GoCV card). Children (aged 5 to 17) pay £4.50. Tickets can be obtained in advance from the Historic Coventry Trust website or purchased on the door. David Mahony gives occasional guided tours; check website for dates and prices. All tickets give visitors readmission for 12 months so you can go back many times during the year to enjoy this special place. □

Photos: Hannah Jones, John Marshall

FOLLOWING the article last month about Coventry courts, reader Martyn Lomas has asked whether anyone else can remember some courts at Gosford Green which, he thinks, were still there in the 1950s. "On the subject of historic courts," he writes, "I do believe I can remember that there were courts at the back or the



Photo courtesy of Rob Orland

side of the White Lion pub on Gosford Green." If anyone else can remember those courts, please let us know. Or perhaps readers know of other courts in the Stoke area?

Our picture postcard (above) shows Walsgrave Road and Gosford Green in 1924, well before Binley Road was widened here and Sky Blue Way was built. The old White Lion is one of the buildings on the left, in a row of houses then known as Gosford Terrace. The pub was demolished in 1926 but replaced with a pub of the same name, which itself was demolished in 1987.

Chace Hotel becomes a listed building



Chace Hotel's fine entrance

Photo: John Marshall

THE Chace Hotel on London Road in Coventry has become a listed building (Grade II) after an assessment by English Heritage.

The national listing comes at a time of great uncertainty for the building after it closed as a hotel and plans were later abandoned for its conversion into a care home. The listing will not guarantee the future viability of the property but it does mean that listed building consent will be required if any changes are proposed.

The listing applies only to the original house, built in 1897 as a country residence for Dr Charles Webb Iliffe, a long-time Coroner for Coventry and Warwickshire.

Dr Iliffe also sat on the Poor Law Board of Guardians and served for 37 years as medical officer for Coventry Workhouse. He was also active in municipal life, becoming a city councillor and a JP.

Dr Iliffe died in 1921 and the building changed ownership in 1930, when it was converted into a hotel. The Chace Hotel was extended in the 1930s, with a new roadside frontage containing a large public bar on the ground floor. It remained a hotel until 2021 (see newsletter article, August 2022, for a fuller description of the hotel's history).

English Heritage highlights the building's architectural and historical interest, both internally and externally, with many of its original features still intact. □

'The Siege of Coventry' and other stories in Lady Herbert's Garden

A SERIES of information panels now adorn Lady Herbert's Garden which not only explain how the garden was created but also tell some interesting tales about the city walls and the remaining city gates which still stand at each end of the garden.

The panels, created by Historic Coventry Trust, tell the touching story of Sir Alfred Herbert and his second wife Florence, after whom the gardens were named, and they explain the role of another city benefactor, Colonel William Wyley, who in 1913 gave Cook Street Gate to the city.



One of several information panels in Lady Herbert's Garden and (below) a surviving section of the city wall. Photos: John Marshall



One particularly striking panel tells the tale of the Siege of Coventry, which took place in 1642. This panel says:

"In August 1642 at the outset of the Civil War, Charles I and his army of 800 cavalry and 300 foot soldiers demanded entry to Coventry. Worried about the expense, the mayor offered to admit the King and only 200 of his men. Keen to secure the city for the royalist cause, Charles rejected the offer, and his artillery began to bombard the city from Park Hill.

"A local's account describes how the King's artillery blew a hole in the wall, the citizens creating a barricade to hold off the attackers. In a less dramatic report, city records claim that there was little damage done to the walls, and the king's forces were unable to breach Coventry's defences. After failing to take the city, Charles' army retreated.

"During the war, the city gates were guarded by 400 men, day and night. Most gates, including Swanswell and Cook Street, were blocked up, with trenches dug outside the walls and cannon kept ready to defend the city.

"After the restoration of the monarchy, Charles II ordered Coventry's walls to be destroyed. They were mostly demolished in 1662, leaving only the 12 gatehouses intact. Citizens were keen to make use of the newly available resources and carried away stones from the ruined walls for themselves."

● Lady Herbert's Garden was developed in the 1930s by local industrialist and philanthropist Sir Alfred Herbert. The garden was named in memory of his late wife Florence, whose initials appear throughout the garden. Sir Alfred spent nearly a decade creating the garden to be a 'haven of peace and floral beauty' in the heart of the city. Recent efforts have been made to rejuvenate the garden and encourage greater use. □