

## Get set to enter the world of a 16<sup>th</sup> century weaver: our visit to the Weaver's House

THE next outdoor event for Stoke Local History Group will give us a great opportunity to visit the Weaver's House, the superbly restored cottage of 16<sup>th</sup> century weaver John Croke in Upper Spon Street.

The Weaver's House is part of a terrace of six cottages, originally built in 1455 by Coventry Priory and rented out to weavers or dyers, who supplied cloth to the priory. It is a rare survivor from a period when the weaving of wool and the production of cloth formed the backbone of Coventry's economy.



*The Weaver's House, part of Black Swan Terrace. Pictured below is the medieval garden. Photos: John Marshall*

The old houses in this terrace, known as Black Swan Terrace, have seen many changes over the years, both internally and externally, but by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century they had all become severely dilapidated. The houses were declared no longer fit for human habitation and seemed destined for demolition. But they were rescued in the 1990s by the sterling work of the Spon End Building Preservation Trust, which embarked on a three-phase restoration project, with support from 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.

Our private group visit on Tuesday June 11<sup>th</sup> (11am start) will allow us to learn more about the house and the harsh conditions of life for a typical weaving family. We will be shown around the cottage by Tina Woodroffe, a specialist guide, who will explain the features of the house and give us some insights into the work of a narrow-loom weaver. We will also be able to see a replica loom in the upper part of the building.

At the rear of the house is a medieval garden, showing plants that would have been grown for food, flavouring, medicine and household use.

**Weaver's House,  
Tuesday June 11<sup>th</sup>.  
Tour begins at 11am.**

The Weaver's House is situated in Upper Spon Street and can be reached on foot from the city centre by walking down Spon Street, going under the subway, and then walking towards Black Swan Terrace on the right. Alternatively, it can be found by walking via Barras Lane or Windsor Street. □

## St John the Baptist Church – a magnificent building in the heart of the city



*Photo courtesy of Rob Orland/ Historic Coventry website*

**DURING** our recent visit to St John the Baptist Church, in the city centre, Fr Dexter Bracey mentioned the existence of an amazing photograph which shows the building in the late 1870s, when it was still undergoing restoration by George Gilbert Scott. This exceptional photograph is shown above. During this period the original grey sandstone of the exterior was being re-clad with local red sandstone, completely changing the appearance of the church. The dilapidated state of the original sandstone is clearly visible on the left side of the church, contrasting sharply with the new red sandstone on the rest of the building.

The photograph also shows a drinking fountain outside the church in Fleet Street. This was erected in 1859 and attracted the attention of a building magazine which described the fountain as being over eighteen feet high, elaborately designed, and standing on three broad steps with a dog trough below. The inscription on the fountain said: "Erected by the Coventry United Temperance and Band of Hope Association, 1859." The fountain was designed by architect Thomas Pratt and erected by Mr Mault, better known to us as the original occupant and builder of Park Cottage, the first house in Stoke Park.

St John's Church itself stands on the site of 'Babbelak', or Bablake, and it is said that oak piles had to be driven into the marshy ground to withstand the weight of the building. Work in recent years to underpin the foundations showed that the church still stood on land with water only one foot below floor level. □



# In search of the past - a stroll through the burial grounds of Stoke Church

ANYONE wishing to take a pleasant stroll in Stoke on a bright summer's day could do no better than visit the burial grounds of Stoke Church, situated only yards from the busy main road but offering a surprisingly quiet and restful space – peaceful and atmospheric - with birds, butterflies and a wide variety of trees. It also offers an opportunity to spot the graves of some prominent former Stoke citizens, as well as numerous Coventry residents from further afield.



*An old picture postcard of Stoke Church and its busy churchyard*



In last month's Jabet's Ash we featured an article about the creation of Poets' Corner and the old house that it replaced, Wyken House. One of the occupants of Wyken House was William Pridmore, a local landowner and part of an affluent Stoke family, with strong connections to the nearby church. Last month's article contained some detail about his life. The photograph on the left shows Pridmore in his prime and is copied from the Rev Blyth's *The History of Stoke* (1897), an invaluable compilation of old parish news and records.

The photograph caption in Blyth's book confirms that William was a Lay Rector at Stoke Church from 1890, the Vicar's Churchwarden from 1882, Superintendent of Stoke Church Sunday School (from 1875), Vice Chairman of the Foleshill Board of Guardians (from 1892) and Chairman of Stoke Parish Council (from 1894).

William Pridmore's funeral took place at Stoke Church in February 1907 and, according to an account in the *Coventry Herald* (February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1907), it was conducted by Rev Blyth and the proceedings were witnessed by a very large number of people who turned up to show their respects. Not only was the church jam-packed, the newspaper said, but almost all the approaches to the church were crowded, with "fully 500" people attending. The original churchyard had long been full but during his lifetime William Pridmore gave additional land to the church so that the burial grounds could be extended. The newspaper reported, appropriately, that William was buried in "that part of the burial ground which Mr Pridmore gave to the parish some years ago."

As we noted last month, his father, William Frederick Pridmore, also a Lay Rector at Stoke Church and a local benefactor, died shortly after his son.

It is here in the grounds of Stoke Church that visitors will find the grave of William Frederick, his wife Elizabeth and son William.

Nearby is the grave of Joshua Perkins, quite probably the final occupant of Wyken House before the property was sold to developers, following the death of his sons.



*Memorial to William Frederick Pridmore, wife Elizabeth and son William Pridmore*

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*The Pridmore family of Brooklyn House in Foleshill have a burial vault at Stoke.*

Also here in the churchyard, to the north of the church, is another Pridmore monument - the burial place of George Alexander Pridmore, a member of the affluent ribbon manufacturing branch of the family, who lived at Brooklyn, a Victorian villa in rural Foleshill. He died in January 1902, aged 82, and the burial vault here is also occupied by other members of his family, including wife Sophia and grandson Captain Percy Malin Pridmore, who was killed in action during the First World War on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1917, aged 31.

Another notable feature of the churchyard is the number of Brays buried here. Members of the Bray family featured prominently in Stoke for long periods, and many were church wardens. It is quite likely that Bray's Lane was named after John Bray, a local farmer and victualler, who ran the Half Moon public house, a building which once stood at the Binley Road end of Bray's Lane. In the 1830s the pub acted as the hub for the registration of horses taking part in races at the nearby Stoke racecourse - an area which later became Stoke Park. □

**Coventry's annual MotoFest will be celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary when it returns to the city on the weekend of June 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. The festival will once again highlight the city's admirable motoring heritage but will also look to the future with features about sustainable motorsport and the latest electric vehicles. Classic car displays will once again dominate the city's streets, and the Cathedral ruins will host the prestigious Coventry Concours. Full details and a programme of events is available online.**



## **Sacred Heart Church and School reaches 100 years**



CELEBRATIONS will take place on Sunday June 9th to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sacred Heart Church in Harefield Road. The original parish, church and school were created in 1924, but in later years the school moved to Bray's Lane and a larger church was added to the original building in Harefield Road. The anniversary celebrations take place at Sacred Heart School and visitors are promised food, games, stalls, an outdoor music festival, fairground rides, a bar and a fireworks finale. Tickets are £5 for adults and children over 12. Younger children are admitted free. The event

runs from 2pm to 10pm. Tickets are required and can be booked at Eventbrite:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/sacred-heart-100th-anniversary-celebration-tickets-893644253017>