

Joseph Wingrave: pioneer of the earliest Victorian photographs of Coventry

OUR first meeting back at Stoke Library after the summer break will feature an illustrated talk by local historian David Fry about the pioneering work of Joseph Wingrave, the city chemist who produced the earliest photographs of Victorian Coventry.

David Fry's talk will explain some of the earliest developments in photography and will illustrate the workings of a vintage plate camera. But the main focus of his talk will be on the remarkable achievements of Joseph Wingrave who, in the 1860s, produced some rare photographs of Coventry – long before the arrival of the more familiar Edwardian postcards.



One of Wingrave's photographs shows his shop in the High Street, seen on the right of this building, next to the corner of Pepper Lane. Photo courtesy of Rob Orland

Joseph Wingrave was born in 1821 to a straw-hat manufacturer in Luton – once the global centre of the hat industry – and as a young man was apprenticed to a chemist in nearby St Albans. But by 1846 he had moved to Coventry, where he opened a chemist shop in the High Street. Here he stayed for the next forty years.

“The reason that this otherwise unremarkable Coventry tradesman is still being remembered today is his early interest in photography at a time when only a few were able to master a difficult and expensive process,” says David Fry.

“The fact that Joseph was a knowledgeable chemist was an important factor. As a result, he was able to add a valuable side-line to his main business by selling photographs of the city from the early 1860s. No other city photographer was doing this because of the difficulty of working outside the studio. So, thanks to Wingrave we have the very first, and therefore oldest, photographic views of Coventry.”

The fully illustrated talk takes place at Stoke Library on Friday October 4th, beginning at 10.30am. No need to book. Everyone welcome. □

Stoke Library, Friday October 4th, starting at 10.30am

David Fry talks about Joseph Wingrave - Coventry's pioneer Victorian photographer

A glance back at the last year

THIS year's AGM will take place on Friday October 4th, starting at 10.30am, and will entail a brief bit of business before David Fry's talk. Our main task will be to approve the annual report and elect, or re-elect, a steering group.

Stoke Local History Group Annual Report – 2024

DURING the last twelve months we've seen another wide-ranging series of talks and events for Stoke Local History Group.



The old Rover Showrooms, now the Litten Tree Building

In October last year we heard journalist and author Chris Arnot talking about his book *Coronation Streets: England Then and Now*, which looked back at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 and the conditions of life in England during those post-war years. This was followed in November by David Fry and John Marshall talking about Stoke Park - its origins and development – and the dramatic impact of the First World War on some of its most prominent citizens.

In December we welcomed Mark Johnson who talked about Coventry's Jewish watchmakers, who made a significant but often overlooked contribution to the city's watchmaking trade during the Victorian era. A talk by Mark Cook in February this year allowed us to appreciate the rich and varied history of the Litten Tree Building, originally a Rover showroom and now destined for demolition under plans for City Centre South. This was followed in March by a presentation by members of Westwood Heath History Group, who described the fascinating history of their area - once part of Lord Leigh's Stoneleigh estate.



Rear of the Weaver's House, with its medieval garden

In April we were joined by Scott Duffin and Adam Wood, who talked about their book, *Elephants of Coventry*. This was followed by outdoor events in the spring which included a visit to St John's Church in Fleet Street and the Weaver's House in Upper Spon Street.

The group newsletter, *Jabet's Ash*, has continued to be produced every month.

We remain grateful, as usual, to Stoke Library for their continued support.

John Marshall, Chair

Financial statement – The group has managed to host meetings in the past with minimal expenses, largely because many speakers have generously given talks without charging a fee. But this is beginning to change as we build up our ability to pay. On several occasions during the past year, we have either made payments to speakers or donated their fee to charity, as requested by the speakers. We have also made donations to St John's Church and the Weaver's House, as a token of gratitude for hosting our visits. Our finances are currently healthy, with a bank balance of £830, some of which is earmarked for a new projector, if and when this is required.

Wynne Lang, Treasurer

Coventry Police Museum showcases stories from city's past

COVENTRY Police Museum has opened a permanent new home this month at the city's Council House.

Once housed at the Little Park Police Station and more recently operating from a temporary shop in Hertford Street, the museum has fiercely resisted efforts to move its collection to the police museum in Birmingham. And those efforts have now been rewarded with a new home in the centre of Coventry.

The museum offers an engaging insight into early policing in Coventry, detailing the activities of night watchmen who, from the 1400s, were required to patrol the streets of the walled city at night to keep the peace. Alongside the night watch, a handful of unpaid parish constables were appointed each year to serve under the Head or High Constable and Justices of the Peace.

By the 1700s the watchmen worked out of a Watchhouse, a three-storey building with cells in the four upper rooms and stocks outside. It was not until 1836 that Coventry City Police Force was established, with Thomas Henry Prosser as the first Chief Constable, in charge of 23 men. The museum tells us that Coventry was one of the first provincial cities to create a paid police force.



Part of the display in Coventry Police Museum, now based in the city's Council House. Photos: John Marshall

Displays in the museum highlight some of the most famous criminal cases in the city, including the trial of Mary Ball, who was accused of murdering her husband in 1849. She was found guilty and was the last person to be publicly executed in Coventry. Gallows were erected in Cuckoo Lane and it is said that around 20,000 people gathered to watch the hanging.

The museum gives further details of Mary Ball's crime and the trial that followed, pointing out the domestic abuse that she suffered and casting doubt on whether she deserved to be hanged.

Other displays in the small museum include a wrecked bicycle from an IRA bombing in Coventry in 1939 and a lengthy account by PC Wilfred Lambert of his experience as a police officer during the night of November 14th, 1940, when much of Coventry city centre was destroyed in the Blitz.

Exhibits also highlight the stories of Edna Goodacre and Kathleen Rowe who became the city's first female police officers in 1938, and Mohammed Daar, the first non-white officer to join the city's police force in 1966.

The Police Museum is usually open on Thursdays and Fridays from 10am to 2pm and is staffed by volunteers, usually retired police officers. A notice outside confirms whether the museum is open. □

Further advance for Gosford loophline walkway

A COUNTRYSIDE walking and cycling route from Gosford Green to Charterhouse Heritage Park has moved a step closer with the completion of the second phase of the project.

The latest phase of the route – which uses the track of the old Gosford loophline railway - starts next to Gosford Park School, where Humber Avenue crosses the former railway line, and extends for 300m to the bridge over Terry Road.

“Completion of the second section means that two-thirds of the route is now in place,” says Historic Coventry Trust, which is overseeing the project. “The route will eventually connect Binley Road cycleway at Gosford Green to the southern end of Charterhouse Heritage Park along the length of the disused railway.”

The Trust admits that the final phase of the project - from Terry Road to Charterhouse Park - will be the most complex yet, running through protected woodland and requiring long ramps due to the height of the embankment.

The latest phase of the scheme, completed with the support of Coventry City Council and a grant of £198,460 from Severn Trent Community Fund, is now open to the public but access to Charterhouse will not be possible until the entire project is completed. □



Volunteers celebrate the completion of phase two of the loophline route. Photo: Historic Coventry Trust



Singers entertain visitors to Kingsfield Orchard.

Photo: John Marshall

Kingsfield Orchard celebrates Heritage Open Days

THE Charterhouse Singers made a surprise visit to Kingsfield Orchard during Heritage Open Days.

The singers joined an enthusiastic crowd of visitors to Stoke's hidden woodland site, which is protected and cared for by Coventry Tree Wardens. The atmospheric location was originally an allotments site, dating back to at least 1860, but is now a wildlife haven, tucked away behind the busy urban street life of Kingsway. □

Mayors of Coventry highlighted in more 'Tomb Tales'

A REMINDER that the next 'Tomb Tales' event at London Road Cemetery will take place on Thursday October

3rd, from 2 to 4pm. The theme will be 'Mayors of Coventry' and the session will consist of two short talks in the Anglican Chapel, featuring tales about former mayors Thomas Soden and John Gulson. The talks, by specialist researchers, will be followed by a tour of the cemetery. Refreshments will be provided. For further information and booking, see the Historic Coventry Trust website (What's On). □

BACK COPIES of Stoke Local History Group newsletter, known since February 2023 as *Jabet's Ash*, are now permanently available online. You can find them in the Stoke section of Rob Orland's excellent website, Historic Coventry. All back issues are available, including the first regular edition which appeared in September 2020. <https://stoke.historiccoventry.co.uk/main/>