

## Sir Henry Parkes – the remarkable story of a poor farmer's boy from Canley

THE history group's first meeting of 2025 will feature an illustrated talk by author and local historian Sheila Woolf, chair of the Stoneleigh History Society, who will tell the remarkable tale of Sir Henry Parkes, originally a local lad from Canley, who emigrated to Australia and is now widely regarded as the founding father of the Australian nation.

Henry Parkes was born in 1815, a few weeks after Waterloo, the youngest child of a poor tenant farmer at Moat House Cottage in Canley - now part of Coventry but then part of Lord Leigh's Stoneleigh estate in rural Warwickshire. Shortly after Henry's birth, the family moved to a larger farm on the Stoneleigh estate, Tocil Farm in Gibbet Hill Road, but this was not a success and the family was evicted and the father jailed for debt.

As a young man, Henry took a chance and emigrated with his wife to Australia where they arrived as practically penniless immigrants.



*Sir Henry Parkes  
State Library of New South Wales*



*Moat House Cottage in Canley, birthplace of Sir Henry, today a private residence Photo: John Marshall*

Astonishingly, Henry Parkes rose to become one of the most important men in the history of the British Empire: he became a leading politician and fulfilled the role of Premier of New South Wales no fewer than five times. He was knighted in 1877 and is seen as the driving force behind efforts to unite the separate colonies of Australia into a single nation.

"His story," says Sheila Woolf, "is one of failure and success combined – in public life he excelled, yet he died a pauper."

Join us on February 7<sup>th</sup> to learn more about this extraordinary man from Canley, and the Stoneleigh estate that formed the backdrop of his early life. Details below. □

### Charterhouse links with National Trust

HISTORIC Coventry Trust confirmed this month that it has formed a partnership with the National Trust to safeguard the future of the city's 14<sup>th</sup> century Charterhouse. The National Trust will take charge of the day-to-day management of the building and will reopen the former monastery to the public in the spring. Ian Harrabin, Chairman of Historic Coventry Trust, said: "The involvement of National Trust opens a new chapter for The Charterhouse with the benefits of their expertise and huge membership attracting a much wider audience. The increase in visitors will not only make the future of this exceptional building secure, but also have a major impact on Coventry's growing attraction as a visitor destination."

Stoke Local History  
Group

Sheila Woolf talks  
about the life of  
Sir Henry Parkes

Friday February 7<sup>th</sup>,  
10.30am  
at Stoke Library

# Hidden in plain sight: Pool Meadow mosaic is a lasting legacy of City of Culture

**MOST** Coventry folk would probably be hard-pressed to name many lasting legacies of the city's brief period as City of Culture. But several artworks still remain and one of these is a hugely impressive mosaic which decorates an entrance to the city's Pool Meadow Bus Station.

Unveiled in June 2021, the artwork by Carrie Reichardt tells the detailed story of Coventry's musical past, with particular emphasis on the explosive impact of 2-Tone music in the late 1970s and early 80s - a local movement inspired by Jamaican ska and featuring bands like The Specials and The Selecter.

The mosaic also includes references to other Coventry groups and it carries a reminder of various pubs, dance halls and other music venues from the city's past. Some of the images were taken from Ruth Carrington's *Dirty Stop Outs Guide to Coventry in the 1970s* (republished in 2023 with an updated and extended edition).



*A unique tiled mosaic tells the story of Coventry's musical heritage.*

*Photos: John Marshall*

These days, bus passengers can be seen hurrying through the Pool Meadow doors, or scurrying past on the pavement, with hardly a glance at the magnificent mosaic which celebrates key parts of Coventry's musical heritage.

It took four months to create the mosaic, composed of numerous individual tiles, and pupils from Frederick Bird School and St Mary & St Benedict School were invited to participate, with pupils given a clay star and asked to write a message. These were then incorporated into the artwork.

Speaking at the time of its unveiling, Carrie Reichardt told BBC Radio CWR: "It's a real celebration. I'm hoping people from Coventry will come and have a look at it and go 'Oh wow, I remember that'."

The title of the mosaic is 'Ska'd for Life', a name taken from the autobiography of Horace Panter, the bassist and a founder member of The Specials. The artwork was commissioned as part of the City of Culture programme and was one aspect of a £1.5 million revamp of the entire bus station. Worth a look, next time you're passing. □

## A colourful welcome at FarGo Village

**ANOTHER** colourful artwork, closer to Stoke and more recent, is a giant mural in Far Gosford Street, welcoming people to Coventry.

Located at the entrance to FarGo Village, this artwork was inspired by children from across the country who were asked to imagine what a greener city could look like. It was designed by local artist Ben Barter and muralist Katie O'Sullivan, and took 40 hours to complete.

It was finished by pupils aged 9-12 from local schools - Earlsdon Primary and West Coventry Academy. The 32 foot mural was commissioned by energy company E.ON and was completed in May last year, offering a vivid and imaginative glimpse into our future. □

