

## Demolition plan for The Langleys, the oldest house at Stoke Green

A PLANNING application has been made to demolish The Langleys, a locally listed house at Stoke Green, which is believed to date back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Records suggest that the house, which has most recently been used as a care home, was built in about 1622 with extensive alterations and additions in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was divided into two properties, one known as The Laurels and the other as Ivy Cottage. But for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the two houses were known as The Laurels and The Langleys.

The building, which sits in the western corner of Stoke Green, close to the Joseph Levi Clock, was turned back into a single house in the late 1980s and converted into a care home. The formal opening took place in November 1989.



*The Langleys today, empty and subject to a planning application for demolition. The house sits behind the Joseph Levi Clock, below left.*

*Photos: John Marshall*



At the time of its conversion, details emerged about the history of the building. In 1988 owners Jeffrey Graham and his brother Leonard Rawnsley were said to be spending £30,000 converting the house into a retirement home. They became intrigued by the history of the property and told journalist Barbara Goulden, of the *Coventry Citizen*, that thick sandstone blocks were found beneath the plaster exterior, and inside the house were solid oak beams, old fireplaces and even remnants of daub and wattle in the walls.

Jeffrey Graham was told that the house was once known as The Bowling Green Inn, though this was not verified at the time or since. However, the *Victoria County History* says that a "Bowling Alley House at Stoke Green" was mentioned in 1641, with "a bowling alley itself, on the Stoke side of Gosford Green", in 1671.

The *Coventry Citizen* report referred to Harry Sutton, an 85-year-old man, who lived in part of the house before the First World

War. He confirmed that the house at that time was divided into two, one being The Laurels and the other Ivy Cottage.

“We lived in The Laurels which my parents rented from a theatrical family who I think came from Blackburn,”

he was quoted as saying. “They toured the country but I remember going to see their productions at Coventry Hippodrome.”



*A watercolour illustration, said to be a view of The Laurels in the 19<sup>th</sup> century*

A follow-up article in the *Citizen* mentioned Leicestershire farmer Robert Forman who inherited a watercolour painting showing how The Laurels looked in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This painting (pictured left) shows a side view of the house.

Mr Forman’s great grandfather, Charles Penn, went to live in The Laurels in 1895. He was a Baptist minister at St Michael’s Baptist Church, formerly in Hay Lane, and had moved to Stoke with his wife Selena Comley and their three children, plus a niece. The Penn

family’s most famous ancestor was William Penn, who founded Pennsylvania.

At the time of its restoration in 1989, the owners of the house confirmed that its original sandstone walls had to be re-covered and most of the original oak timber had to be replaced with mock beams. The property was also extended at that time and given a new two-storey east wing.

The new planning application says that the purpose of demolition would be to clear the site for a self-build house, subject to planning permission. The applicant’s heritage statement says that the existing house has had “extensive alterations” and “much of the original features have been lost over time to extensions, alterations, additions and replacement”.

It adds that although the property dates to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, changes have been “unsympathetic” and “diminished the overall quality and attractiveness of the heritage asset”. It claims that a replacement building would be of “high quality design and would potentially enhance the Conservation Area”, although it provides no details about a new building.

Local residents are currently discussing the planning application. Corrine Spencer of the Gosford Park Residents Association has been told that the existing house is in poor condition and would be very expensive to restore. Ann Wilson, a resident of nearby Stoke Park, suggests that one solution - if permission is given - would be to retain the shell of the existing building, or at least the frontage, to create a new home.



*The Langleys shares a drive with a modern house on the right*

The Coventry Society is also considering the planning application and is yet to decide whether there are grounds for objection. They are studying a dossier of historic details supplied by David Fry, which has also informed this report. □ JM

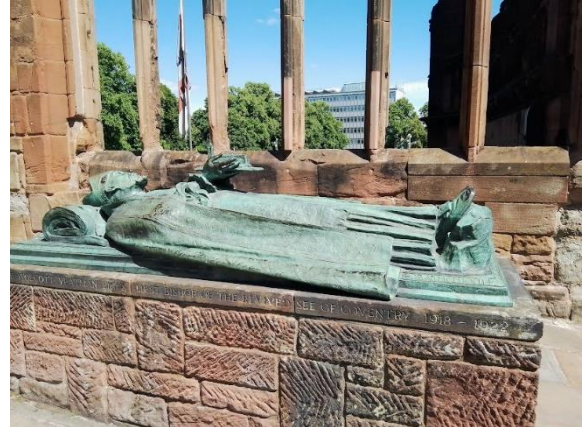
□ *The Coventry Citizen* reports, referred to above, appeared on 26 May 1988, 2 June 1988, and 23 November 1989.



# Bishop Yeatman-Biggs and the Lady Chapel

IN last month's *Jabet's Ash* we mentioned the only artefact inside the old Coventry Cathedral to survive the bombing of November 1940 – a tomb and bronze effigy (pictured right) of Bishop Yeatman-Biggs, the first Bishop of the newly revived Coventry Diocese when St Michael's became a Cathedral in 1918.

Bishop Huyshe Wolcott Yeatman-Biggs had previously been Bishop of Southwark and Bishop of Worcester before taking over at Coventry. He died in July 1922 and was buried in the Cathedral at Coventry. His effigy was



the work of

sculptor Sir William Hamo Thornycroft (1850-1925) and it features a small replica of St Michael's Cathedral in the Bishop's hands. During the Blitz, slight damage was done to the effigy - one of the Bishop's hands was severed - but otherwise the memorial remained largely intact. Any minor war damage was later repaired.

The effigy was originally placed in front of the huge window of the Lady Chapel, a position it still occupies today in the Cathedral ruins. This corner of the old church was sometimes known as the Drapers Chapel, while others called it the 'Chapel on the Mount', owing to its unusually high position above ground level. The photograph below, taken before 1918 when St Michael's was still a parish church, shows the Lady Chapel as it would have been before the Blitz.



Contemporary colour photos by John Marshall. Postcard of the Lady Chapel, pre-1918, courtesy of Rob Orland



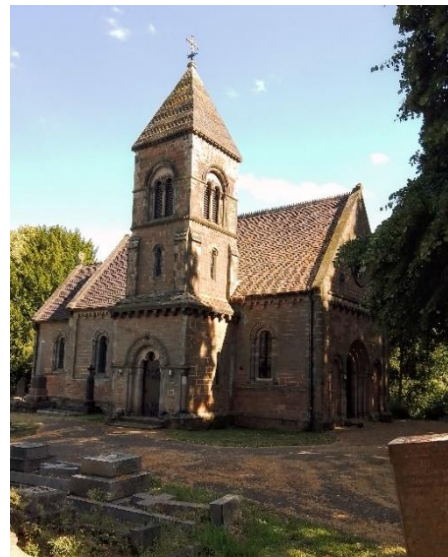
## Summer events at the Anglican Chapel, London Road Cemetery

HISTORIC Coventry Trust has announced that the Anglican Chapel at London Road Cemetery will open most Fridays during the summer and will host a number of talks and tours.

The Grade II listed Chapel, first built in 1847, will be open to visitors from 10am until 4pm each Friday from July 25<sup>th</sup> to August 29<sup>th</sup>, with the exception of August 8<sup>th</sup>.

Events at the Chapel will include talks by local historians, singalong sessions and a “gruesome deaths” tour of the cemetery.

Sessions lined up so far include a talk by Nigel Clews and David Fry about Charles Hathaway, a Triumph cycle engineer, and his son Syd Hathaway, a First World War pilot (July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2pm); a gruesome deaths tour with Sue Lomas (August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2pm); and a talk by Nigel Clews about Joe



Vickers, a bare-knuckle fighter, watchmaker and publican (August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2pm).

Later events include singalong sessions with the Sherbourne Singers and a presentation by David Fry who will step back in time to view Historic Coventry Trust’s properties as they were in the Victorian era (August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2pm).

Pre-booking is not required and there is no formal charge for admission, although a donation of £5 is suggested. Check the Historic Coventry Trust website for further details and updates (‘Drop-in Fridays at the Chapel’). Details of other Historic Coventry Trust events are also on the website.



*New signage now adorns the front entrance to London Road Cemetery, emphasising Joseph Paxton’s name and his intention that the cemetery should not just be a burial ground but also an arboretum and a place of beauty for citizens to stroll.*

*Photos: John Marshall*

## Back issues of *Jabet’s Ash* available online

A REMINDER that all back issues of *Jabet’s Ash*, the newsletter of Stoke Local History Group, are now available online. Back issues include articles about a wide variety of subjects, including a look at the old trams that once served Stoke (March 2021); a brief history of Copsewood Grange (April 2021); Siegfried Bettmann and the Triumph Works in Priory Street (November 2021); the famous duel at Gosford Green when King Richard II came to town (April 2022); and a description of Andrew Carnegie’s visit to Coventry in 1914 (March 2023). Lots of other things too! Back issues can be found in the Stoke section of Rob Orland’s excellent Historic Coventry website. Google search: ‘Historic Coventry Stoke newsletters’

*Jabet’s Ash* is named after a famous landmark that once formed a boundary marker between Stoke and the old city of Coventry. □

## Summer break

AS usual, the history group takes a summer break in August and September. Our next meeting will be back at Stoke Library with a guest speaker on Friday October 3<sup>rd</sup>.

We hope to see you there. Details will follow in future newsletters.