

Coventry's rich history unveiled during Heritage Open Days

ONCE again, Coventry venues are offering a rich and varied programme of activities for this year's Heritage Open Days – which take place from September 12th to 21st.

Highlights include a tour of the Telegraph Hotel in Corporation Street – once the home of the Coventry Evening Telegraph (see p2) – and a behind-the-scenes exploration of the Albany Theatre, which includes a talk about the art deco theatre.

Other attractions include a tour of Bond's Hospital, the Masonic Hall (Dalecote House), King Henry VIII School, the Police Museum, the old Council House, Priory Row Cottages, the Lunt Roman Fort, Ford's Hospital, Bagot's Castle, St Mary's Guildhall, Charterhouse, the City Gates, the Weaver's House and even the ultra-modern Lanchester Library.



Pictures: King Henry VIII School, Ford's Hospital and Swanswell Gate. Photos: John Marshall



Numerous other venues are also open on various days – all free of charge. Check in advance for opening times.

Coventry Cathedral will stage exhibitions about the building of the Cathedral and the weaving of the Tapestry. They will also open the Blitz Museum and the Wyley Chapel in the Cathedral Ruins. And over at London Road Cemetery, the Anglican Chapel will be open on September 13th with cemetery tours available. Among the other



venues open during the heritage festival will be the Great Meeting House on Holyhead Road, and Daimler Powerhouse on Sandy Lane.

In Stoke, Kingsfield Orchard will open once again to reveal the old overgrown allotments and orchard which are now a wildlife haven. Currently under the care of the Coventry Tree Wardens, the original 'King's Field' was so named because it occupies a plot said to have been used by King Richard II when he set up camp to oversee a famous duel at Gosford Green in 1398. Kingsfield Orchard is open on Saturday and Sunday, September 20th-21st, from 11am to 3pm. The entrance is close to the Binley Road roundabout, near the junction with Kingsway.

Check the Heritage Open Days website for exact details of the entire programme - including the dates and opening times of each venue, and whether pre-booking is required.

Behind the scenes at the Telegraph Hotel

NEXT month's Heritage Open Days will provide a rare opportunity for visitors to tour the Telegraph Hotel in Corporation Street – once the home of the Coventry Evening Telegraph.

Visitors are invited to join a guided tour, exploring the unique architecture of the building and its careful conversion into a hotel - "blending mid-century charm with sleek modern design".

"This special event," says the hotel, "delves into the building's journey from bustling newspaper headquarters into a stylish and contemporary hotel."

"Attendees will gain insight into the meticulous restoration process, the craftsmanship involved, and the vision that preserved original design features while introducing a fresh, urban aesthetic. Led by one of the project's key developers, the experience will highlight hidden elements, rarely seen areas, and untold stories behind the evolution of this historic site."

The tour takes place on Saturday September 20th, beginning at 11.30am. Pre-booking is required. To make a booking, send an email to info@telegraph-hotel.com.



An opportunity to explore the Telegraph Hotel. Photo: John Marshall



A Victorian 'Penfold post box' in Norwich – with a distinctive hexagonal shape. Photo: John Marshall

Hexagonal post box

IN May this year, *Jabet's Ash* looked briefly at the history of the British post box and we observed that some early boxes were hexagonal in shape.

A box of this type - six-sided and designed by architect John Penfold – can still be seen on some streets in Britain, including this one (left), recently spotted on a trip to Norwich.

It was known, for obvious reasons, as a 'Penfold box' and this one in Norwich probably dates from around 1871. Between 1866 and 1879 the hexagonal Penfold became the standard design for pillar boxes in Britain and it was during this period that red was first adopted as the standard colour. The Penfold box was made of cast iron and produced by a company in Dudley, West Midlands. The Royal cipher on the box stands for Queen Victoria

The box in Norwich was originally positioned in Gentleman's Walk but was severely damaged by a vehicle in 2001. But, after years in storage, Royal Mail decided to restore the post box in 2019 and it now sits on the corner of St Peter's Street and Bethel Street, close to Norwich Market and City Hall.

The Langleys – plan withdrawn

THE planning application to demolish The Langleys, the oldest house at Stoke Green (see *Jabet's Ash*, July), has been withdrawn. The reason for the withdrawal is unknown and the future of the house – currently empty – remains uncertain.

Final closure for city's oldest shoe shop - once destroyed in the Blitz

IT is one of the oldest retail shops in Coventry – having a history going back for 185 years – but the doors are set to close for the final time on Charles Ager's shoe shop.

Manager Karen Garrett told us that the whole store in Corporation Street will close on August 22nd.

A few months ago it was announced that only the children's department would close but owner Chris Hart, great-great-grandson of the founder, has now agreed to vacate the entire premises. Ager's will be replaced with Chocoberry - serving brunch, coffee and desserts.

The history of the Ager business is well known. The shop was originally opened by brothers Charles and Walter Ager in 1840 when they came to Coventry in search of new opportunities. The brothers started life as farmers in Northamptonshire but Charles used his skills as a cobbler to start a shoe shop in Coventry.



Last orders at Ager's shoe shop



Charles Ager's shop in old Smithford Street, and below right, only the iron girders remained after the Blitz

The first shop was in the old West Orchard and the early success of that shop prompted a move to bigger premises in Smithford Street, the city's principal shopping street at the time. It was here that the shop established a formidable reputation for fine shoes, with many being made on the premises by expert cobblers.

Ager's shop was particularly well known for its children's shoes, and many generations of Coventry kids have relied on Ager's for well-fitted shoes.

The Smithford Street shop was a victim of the Blitz during the Second World War, when the store was completely destroyed. The blast was so severe that only the iron girders remained. Of the

contents, it is said that only the sand-bagged safe survived, inside of which was a lump of melted silver coins and bank notes which crumbled at a touch.

Ager's quickly reopened at a temporary site in Corporation Street with a sign saying 'Business as usual'. And in 1945, after the War, the current store in Corporation Street opened.

In a statement issued on Facebook, Chris Hart said he is "absolutely devastated" to close the Coventry store. But he explained that "retail shopping habits have changed, especially in children's fitted shoes and the massive growth of cut price online shopping". According to the statement, this has made it harder and harder for small retail shops to survive. □



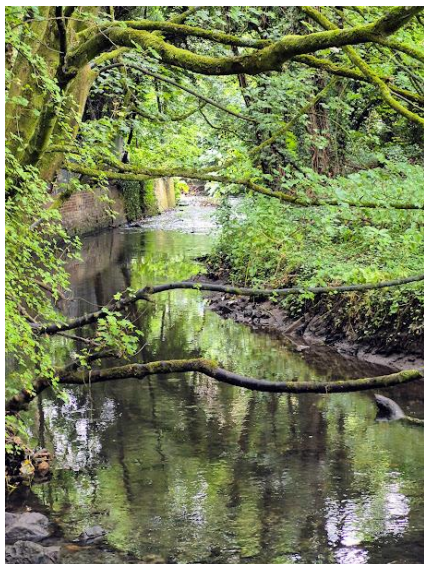
Exploring Charterhouse fields

HISTORY group members keenly grasped the opportunity last month to explore the amazing depths of Charterhouse fields, the vast area of land which sits beside the River Sherbourne, within walking distance of the old Carthusian monastery.

This fascinating area, often overgrown and with slightly tricky terrain, incorporates a wartime sluice gate, old allotments, a school playground, a mainline railway, the Sherbourne Viaduct and the Folly Lane tunnels. As our guide John Payne explained, future improvements could see proper footpaths, signage and better visibility of some historic features. When complete, the fields will surely deserve the posher title: 'Charterhouse Heritage Park'.



Photo: John Marshall



Photos by Bev Orland