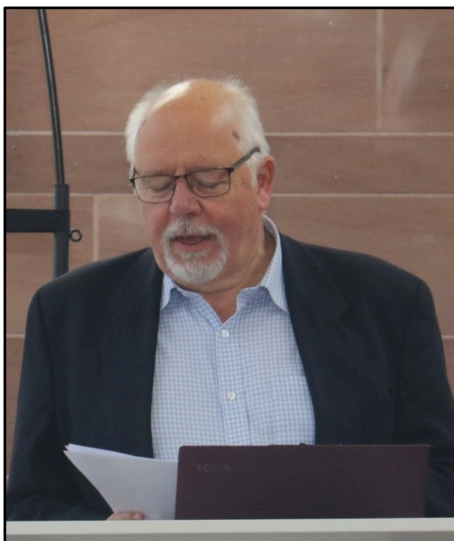




Heritage Conference

Priority Visitor Centre 2024

Our Heritage, Our Future 2



Peter Walters opening the day's event at the Priory Centre.

Welcome by Peter Walters:

Chair of the Heritage Committee, Deputy Chair of the Coventry Society.

Peter welcomed guests to the Conference, the fourth to be held. The Society was pleased to be able to stage the conference at the Priory Centre which it is hoped will have a successful future in its current guise. The use of different venues for these conferences by the Society has helped to show the range of historic buildings in the city and the Society has been pleased to be able to do this. The main focus of the first part of the morning session was on the history and importance of cycling in the city.



The Heritage Conference was well attended by many people from the different groups and societies around the city.

List of the Talks and Speakers

- * Opening remarks by Pete Walters from the Coventry Society
- * Brief History of Coventry Cycle History by Mark Cook
- * The National Cycle Archive at the Modern Records Centre, Warwick University by Rachel McGregor: Digital Preservation Officer.
- * The Work of Warwickshire Wildlife Trust within Coventry by Jordan Davies
- * St Mary's Guild Hall Tapestry by Mark Webb
- * Coventry Society Update by Trevor Cornfoot
- * Coventry's First Pubs by Fred Luckett
- * The Phoenix Diaries by Helene Barratt, daughter of Sir Charles Barratt, Coventry's Town Clerk
- * Coventry Family History Society by Paul Salisbury
- * Reform Club Restoration by Robert Davies
- * The History of All Souls Church by Paul Palmer
- * Report Back by Pete Walters from the Coventry Society



Mark opened his talk by revealing that the Butts Cycle Track, which existed until 2001, first opened in 1879. It started life as a cinders and gravel banked track with penny farthing bicycles racing round it. Just after the Second World War, two particularly famous female cyclists, both based in Coventry, rose to prominence in the field of endurance cycling. Each of them broke a considerable number of records. One was Edie Atkins, one of whose sons John Atkins went on to become cyclocross champion on multiple occasions. Edie herself rode a bicycle produced by Harrisons in London but which was assembled and

Brief history of Coventry Cycle History by Mark Cook

prepared by Tom Bromwich in Coventry. The other was Eileen Sheridan, who also enjoyed considerable success in the course of her career. She rode a Hercules Maestro, which Mark speculated was in fact a badged cycle actually made for her by the same Tom Bromwich, whose workshop stood behind what later came to be the cycle shop owned by John Atkins in Far Gosford Street. Both of these bicycles can be viewed in the collection housed in the Coventry Transport Museum. Moving close to the present day, Mark explained that the bicycle he had ridden that day to the conference has a frame made in Coventry by Tom Bromwich. Likewise the saddle was one produced in Coventry by Middlemore, which had premises in Little Park Street and Torrington Avenue. Another of the bikes on display was produced by a company called W. & E. Pollards, a father and son team also based in Coventry.

Most recently of all, Mark mentioned another Coventry frame builder who is still producing bespoke frames, namely Lee Cooper, who, as is common in this industry, has made specialist frames for a large number of cycle companies including the John Atkins branded bike on display. Concluding his presentation, Mark made reference to the Coventry Cycling Centre based at the Peace House on Stoney Stanton Road, which has refurbished bicycles dating as far back as the 1950s and supplied two of the bikes on display today.



Coventry Cycling Centre based at the Peace House

The National Cycle Archive at the Modern Records Centre, Warwick University by Rachel McGregor Digital Preservation Officer.

Rachel explained that the National Cycle Archive is one constituent element of the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick. The Centre dates back to 1973 and holds approximately 1,500 collections with a particular focus on the history of trade unions as well as topics such as electoral reform and campaigning organisations, including for example CND. It also has a range of personal papers concerning a number of well-known political figures. The National Cycle Archive itself was established in 1990 in conjunction with the Cyclists Touring Club (now Cycling U.K.) with an emphasis, not on the cycle industry, but on individuals and organisations engaged in cycling as an activity. Chief among its holdings is a number of cycling diaries and travelogues. One such item is entitled 'A Twenty Day Cycle Tour in the North of France' from 1914 by Walter Dodds who, very poignantly, wrote up the details of his tour just at the time that the country-side he had recently visited was being laid waste

in the First World War. Similar diaries and journals are preserved in the Archive such as those written around the end of the 19thC by Arthur Armstrong and Charles Hall, some of them written almost in the whimsical style of Jerome K. Jerome's 'Three Men in a Boat'. Other collections are in the form of lectures with accompanying lantern slides such as the one produced by a CTC official who gave a talk at the Bath Assembly Hall on Priory Street in Coventry in 1930. In addition to the writings of men active in cycling, a number of holdings produced by women were also mentioned, among them the diary of Amy Malden, written around 1900, and containing pressed flowers picked while touring Switzerland. Another female cyclist and diarist known as Petronella also produced photographs and lectures which feature in the Archive, along with records relating to topics such as national dress which might allow women to ride bicycles more easily, as well as debates from the 1890's



about concerns over health and matters of propriety arising from women's growing involvement in cycling.



Finally Rachel extended an invitation to Conference participants to visit the Archive situated behind the library on the main campus and also to sample the online collections available from the University website as well as the online catalogue at:

<https://mrc-catalogue.warwick.ac.uk/records/NCA>



The work of Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Within Coventry by Jordan Davies,

Project Communications & Interpretations Officer.

Jordan started by explaining how the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, which is behind the project, is using a national movement named 'Team Wilder' to help drive the project forward. 'Team Wilder' is aimed at getting individuals involved in volunteering for wildlife projects, especially those from urban environments (motto: '30 by 30' meaning 30% of land and sea protected by 2030) which is perfect for the Sherbourne Project. Its stated aim is to 'work with partner

organisations and local communities to rewrite the future of Coventry's River Sherbourne by establishing an urban living landscape in which people, nature and culture can thrive.' Practically this means organising volunteers along the length of the Sherbourne in the city in thirty mini projects based on the Coundon Wedge, Lakeview Park, Spon Gate Bridge, the Burges, Charterhouse Heritage Park and Whitley Abbey Bridge. Tasks involve river restoration, wilder wetlands, improved access, communications and interpretations, wildlife censuses, improving skills and organising events. Much has already been achieved in restoring the ancient

course of the river in the Coundon Wedge. This has resulted in creating a new wetland habitat as part of the rewilding. Also much has been achieved in the Lakeview Park area such as river clearance and improved access. Public involvement has been the aim of presentations in the Lower Precinct showing the work of the project as well as a photographic exhibition. Culvert scanning under the city centre and the organisation of the River Festival has brought further publicity to the project's works.

The overall scheme only received the green light in November 2022 and with a four year life there is plenty to come.

Research on St Mary's Guildhall Tapestry by Mark Webb

Mark recounted how he became interested in the Tapestry as a young boy. This interest has continued and he was pleased to have been able to follow it up with further research. The book produced as a result of this research was launched two weeks previously with a panel of experts. Interest in the Tapestry was widespread and went back many years. Articles in publications such as 'Archaeologia' had helped to maintain interest. The last person to give details of the Tapestry was A. F. Kendrick 100 years ago. He also produced a detailed painting of the work at the time. Fundamental questions to be asked were: where was it made? Who commissioned it? What did it cost? When and why was it commissioned? It is believed to have been woven in the early 16thC, certainly by 1519 in Flanders which was then part of France. It is clear that the Tapestry was designed for its position in the Guildhall as it links with the window above and fits exactly in the allocated space. Architectural features line up with the mullions of the window. Research on the Tapestry had revealed more information. During cleaning some of the fibres had become detached and



further analysis had revealed how the dyes were formed, their colours (though faded they were well preserved), and their sources. Three quarters of the reverse was covered in patches indicating repair work. Some restoration had taken place in the 1980's.

Mark pointed out some of the figures in the Tapestry and their significance. It is clear that they are hierarchical, the 'natural' order, giving the message to the people to know their place (in society).

The King and Queen represented are Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou who spent time in Coventry, a fiercely Lancastrian city, which during the Civil War hosted the Royal Court and Parliament. Judging by their dress and positioning, other figures seem to depict Protestants. However, the Tapestry is definitely a Catholic work and it is likely that in the mid-16thC when England was officially

protestant, changes were made to the Tapestry so as to remove the rosary beads and bring the figures more into line with protestant imagery. It was noted that in the late 17thC an addition was made to the Tapestry representing Justice. It is uncertain why but it could be because at the time the Trinity Guild was dissolved and the Hall was used as a court. The Trinity Guild of Coventry is believed to be the body that commissioned the Tapestry during a period when the city was in decline. It cost £1,000 a large sum at the time. It is thought to have been woven some where between 1505 and 1515 as the costumes are from that time, particularly the women in French hoods and the attire of the courtiers. It was probably commissioned in anticipation of the visit to Coventry by Henry VII who had attempted to have his uncle, Henry VI, beatified. The cult of Holy St. Henry was very popular.

The role of the Coventry Society in enhancing Coventry's built environment

by Trevor Cornfoot Chair of the Coventry Society

Trevor began by noting some of the local issues and campaigns in which the Society is involved such as the River Sherbourne project, concerns over the state of the Old Grammar School, the Spon End redevelopment and the takeover of public spaces by private owners and tenants. As examples of the latter he cited the canopied walkways in Corporation Street and the square fronting the Britannia Hotel. The Society tries to keep abreast of developments, commenting on, sometimes supporting and sometimes objecting to planning applications. He used as an example of supporting applications, the Abbots Park development which the Planning Committee had opposed, only to have the refusal judged perverse by the Inspector. This resulted in an award of £600,000 to the developer. Another development supported was that for a solar farm at Alderman's Green. In a strange ruling by the Planning Committee, it turned down the Council's own application, against the advice of the officers.

A development to which the Society had objected was the one at Coundon Wedge. This appears to have been driven by the Council's need for capital rather than any need for housing as there is already considerable development going on in North West Coventry. In addition the Society is monitoring progress on the proposed City Centre South development and is interested to see what is proposed for City Centre North. Judging by some of the decisions made, the Society is concerned at the Planning Committee's decision making and feels it should do better, primarily by supporting the primacy of the Council's own local plan. The Society is aware of the need for a well-planned city and has worked hard to respond to the proposed new Local Plan, engaging with its public consultation paper, consisting of 108 questions, and meeting with council planners. Comments have also been submitted about the Warwick University SPD

(Supplementary Planning Document) concerning its draft proposals for future development.

The Society has also responded to the Government's National Planning Policy Framework, having originally responded to the previous government's proposals and to the very different set proposed by the new government. Comments have been submitted in association with Civic Voice. One of our Committee members, Tim Brown is part of the Civic Voice expert panel. The Society values the response by Civic Voice on many critical issues such as housing need, suitability of 'grey belt land', achieving the targets for new housing and ensuring more social housing. Finally Trevor concluded by stating that the prize for civic societies such as the Coventry Society in seeking to enhance their environment is community involvement in order to achieve sustainable, appropriate development led by proper planning and co-ordinated thinking, a prize worth having.

There followed a series of talks by individuals involved in heritage work in local groups.

Coventry's First Recorded Alcohol Outlet and Licensing History. by Fred Luckett

Fred gave a brief outline of his interest in the topic of pub histories. A Coventrian himself, he was a founding member of the local branch of CAMRA and has written a number of books including 'The History of Brewing in Warwickshire' and '100 Years of Coventry Pubs', with a new title 'Drinking in an Old English Town' to follow soon. Turning to the specific issue of identifying Coventry's first outlet for provision of alcohol, from the outset Fred made clear that neither 'The Windmill' nor 'The Golden Cross' can lay claim to this title. He pointed out that identifying such premises from historical records is difficult for a number of reasons. For example, no licensing records exist before 1740, and when such records did first appear they related only to the licence holder and not to the

name or location of the premises where sales were made. It seems more than plausible that alehouses must have existed when Lady Godiva was alive, although such sales were likely to have been made 'out of door' for consumption off the premises. More specifically, records kept in the Coventry Archives refer to a tavern on Park Street at the beginning of the 13thC, called the White Cellar. Later documents, primarily deeds, bear the same name but confusingly give a number of differing locations such as Much Park Street, Gosford Street and Earl Street. In 1348, William Cook is referred to as the innkeeper of the White Cellar, which Fred conjectured might even have become Coventry's largest establishment by this date, while in 1355 the landlord of the White Cellar is recorded as being

financed for selling short measures. Subsequent records from the 15thC refer to the White Cellar as standing on the corner of Much Park Street and Earl Street. However, it seems that these premises were repurposed to become a draper's shop, with the last reference to the White Cellar appearing in 1498.



Concluding his talk, Fred expressed the hope that in the future perhaps a cellar might be found at this location to confirm the presence of the White Cellar.

The Phoenix Diaries, Post-War diaries of a 'Town Clerk', by Helene Barratt, daughter of Sir Charles Barratt, Coventry Town Clerk, 1946 – 1970.



Helene spoke about transcribing her father's diaries for the City Archives.

Sir Charles Barratt served as Town Clerk [equivalent to Chief Executive today] overseeing the redevelopment of the city and the restructuring of local government in the post-war years. He was an avid diary keeper and there are 18 volumes covering his period in office. These were nearly burned by his wife but following her death at 100 in 2006, Helene and her sister were able to retrieve the diaries from the attic. She now refers to them as the Phoenix Diaries, having survived possible incineration.

Helene showed members one of the diary pages which are full of photographs, inserts and attachments, which can only be transcribed manually.

Travel was a key part of Sir Charles' life. She described his trip to Dresden and his comments that the Germans might have bombed our city but 'my goodness we made a mess of theirs.' He thought that it should 'never, ever, happen again.'

The top council officer in his day earned only £5,000 a year, a big difference to the pay of Council Chief Executive today. But then petrol was only 3/6d a gallon and the state pension was 30 shillings a week.

Sir Charles was closely associated with the foundation of Warwick University, against resistance from the then Lanchester College which the council had founded.

He was an early adopter of computers and was promoting them back in the early 1960s.

He had a poor opinion of politicians, saying one unnamed politician would feed his wife to the wolves if he thought that he could profit from it.

Helene ended by quoting from a speech given by her father on July 6th 1966 after the granting of his knighthood and reflecting on 25 years legal service to the city. He spoke about how there was a sense of purpose in the city following the aftermath of the Blitz. There was a determination to rid the world of evil.

Even during the war, at a time of distress, the city was sending material aid to Stalingrad and responding to the tragedy of Lidice in Czechoslovakia. In 1946 there were shortages of everything, money, materials and manpower and the city could not get money from the government in its ambitious rebuilding plans. However, a donation of flowers from the Netherlands, displayed in Broadgate, brought about a change of heart and the city was permitted to make a start on its regeneration plans.

Looking back Sir Charles commented on the strange absence of hatred and the deep sense of the need for positive action to extend the hand of friendship. He saw the city as a community of people.

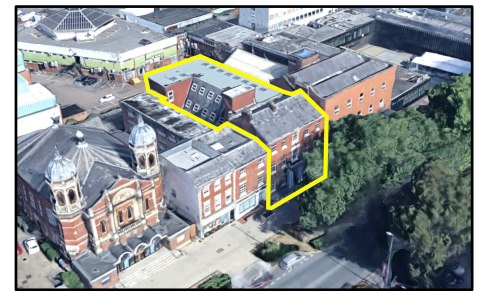
Helene commented that the challenges of 1966 seem to be as relevant today as they were then.

Sir Charles Barratt retired from the City Council in June 1970 and died on 10th February 1971.



Sir Charles Barratt is in the centre of the photograph with Lord Rootes on the left and Lord Iliffe on the right at a Warwick University Promotion Committee meeting.

Renovation of the Reform Club and associated problems by Robert Davies, conservation architect.



Robert introduced himself as an architect specialising in churches and cathedrals. He explained his involvement with the building known as the Reform Club on Warwick Row, first by giving a brief outline of its history. In 1820 it was a townhouse in the neo-classical style with a coach-house accessed by a door at the front. It was part of a terrace of similar houses. In 1870 it became the Reform Club. In 1970 it was converted into offices and continued as such until 2020 when it was sold to the current owners. Having survived the Blitz and the reconstruction of the city, it now fell prey to redevelopment. Although a listed building, the new owners, unwittingly, started alterations without having the necessary listed building planning consent. The council was alerted, stepped in and the work halted. Robert was called in to give advice and guidance. He found that ceiling bosses and cornices had in some cases been removed and the areas covered with plaster boarding which had been hammered into place. Plaster had been hacked off the walls to have plaster board fitted over them. In some cases the boarded ceilings could have failed with the additional weight. Floors had also been covered with boarding,

fireplaces removed and York Stone steps covered over. Cracks in the fabric of the building caused by the unconsented work threatened the integrity of the building. The owners were fined and ordered to restore the building as much as possible. An experienced contractor was employed to begin the work and repair the damage.



Robert went on to explain how the situation had been redressed. Where possible original fittings and features were restored or new ones made to replace those missing and walls replastered with relevant materials. The owners showed appreciation of the situation and did what they could to ensure the work was carried out even taking care to have each window correctly repaired.

The original work, the subsequent fine and the remedial work has been costly and further costs will be incurred to make the building suitable for re-use. The future use of the building is not yet known.





Coventry Family History Society and its value to local historians

by Paul Salisbury

Paul described the work of the Family History Society since its inauguration, now celebrating its 30th anniversary. Its focus has always been on Coventry people rather than places, to enable family historians locally, nationally and internationally fill in the gaps in their family trees. He outlined the steps that should be taken by any beginner to family research. First speak to surviving family members, look at family Bibles if they exist, collect family photographs noting similarities with current generations of the family and all relevant information. Obtain key dates, births, marriages and deaths. Always try to obtain proof of any information. From these sources a basic family tree can be constructed.

There are many other official records that are of help such as the censuses from 1841 onwards (bearing in mind that they may not always be correct) as well as newspaper archives. Paul also described the unique set of records that had been created by the Family History Society over its lifetime. These 800,000 digital items make it so much easier to search various records such as those from Coventry's cemetery and church records as well as from the Records Office and apprenticeship rolls. All are available on the Society's website which is well worth a visit.

<https://www.covfhs.org/>

He noted that the 1994 Data Protection Act may prevent access to some information.

Paul's informative talk also had an important warning about researching family history, namely not to trust any information until it can be cross-checked!

The Family Tree



So where do we start

- Ask the family
- Look at photographs
- Write down names
- Obtain key dates
- Look for evidence i.e. documents etc.

CFHS Records Pawnbroker Tickets

Name	MR	FC	MR	FC	MR	FC	MR	FC	MR	FC	MR	FC	MR	FC	MR	FC	MR	FC	MR	FC	MR	FC	MR	FC	MR	FC	
Adams	1842																										

CFHS Records

Records on CFHS Website

- Coventry Schools Admission Records
- Coventry Apprentice Enrolments 1781-1975
- Coventry Census 1841-1851-1861-1871-1891-1901
- Courtalds Register of Hands 1900-1932
- London Road 1847-1972
- London Road 1972-Dec 1994
- 1931 Electoral Roll, Coventry
- Canley Gardens 1943-Dec 1994
- Coventry Pawnbroker Tickets 1916-1920
- St Pauls Register 1807- Dec 1844

CFHS Records

Record Nos.

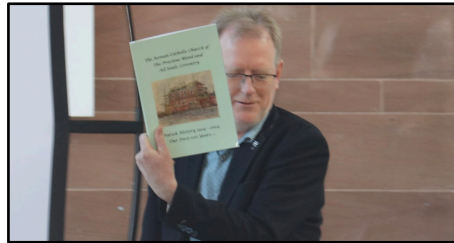
- Coventry Apprentice Enrolments 1781-1975 **58,593**
- Coventry Census 1841-1851-1861-1871-1891-1901 **366,286**
- Courtalds Register of Hands 1900-1932 **28,608**
- London Road 1847-1972 **9,387**
- London Road 1972-Dec 1994 **125,553**
- 1931 Electoral Roll, Coventry **115,779**
- Canley Gardens 1943-Dec 1994 **27,135**
- Coventry Pawnbroker Tickets 1916-1920 **11,114**
- St Pauls Register 1807- Dec 1844

The Centenary of All Souls church by Paul Palmer Historian for the church

The full name of the church is the Roman Catholic Church of the Precious Blood and All Souls. It is situated in the Chapelfields area of Coventry. Paul has recently published a book about its history.

In 1917 there were three Roman Catholic churches in Coventry. It was decided that a fourth church was needed to meet the growing Catholic population of the city. The decision was made to build and dedicate the church as a memorial to those lost during the Great War. Father McCaffery of St. Osburg's Church was the moving spirit behind the project.

Money was collected by the local community with £4,000 raised during 1917. By 1923 this had risen to £8,000 and construction began. The architect for the building was George Cave of Coventry. The foundation stone was laid by Archbishop McIntyre in September 1923. Although not yet complete, the church was first used



for Christmas Mass in 1924 and was formally opened by the Bishop of Lancaster on 28th May 1925.

Father Hampton was installed as Parish Priest in 1937 and was instrumental in having the church extended. This took place from 1938 to 1939 from designs by E. Bower Norris. The extensions comprised the tower, transepts, crossing apse, side chapels and sacristies.

During the Second World War the church was affected by bomb damage and was partially rebuilt and sensitively repaired from 1952 to 1962 by Sandy & Norris & Partners. Further changes to the building continued into the 1970s.

Research for the centenary of the church has been hampered by the loss of the records resulting from the construction of the ring road next to the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Birmingham. They were simply incinerated!

Report Back: Peter Walters

In this final session of the conference, Peter highlighted the progress of two restoration projects featured in previous conferences which at the time seemed daunting.

The Edwardian Pavilion in Spencer Park, Earlsdon: This was featured first of all two years ago and was going to need about £400,000 to restore and renovate. Remarkably over £300,000 has been raised and a lease signed with Coventry City Council. Work is expected to start in the New Year.

Victorian Summer Houses, Stoney Road: These buildings were on the verge of collapse when the problem was first aired at the conference two years ago. However, Historic England has provided a grant of £280,000 with a further grant of £20,000 from Coventry City Council. After a preliminary survey to ascertain the extent of the problem, work has now started on three of the summer houses. The allotment holders have been campaigning for several years to get something done.

Both projects show that with persistence, a strong team and the right ideas, small community heritage groups can persuade major funders and local authorities to act.

In his closing remarks, Peter issued a plea for more involvement in the Coventry Society's Coventry Heritage Network, launched at last year's conference. With 130 subscribers so far, the network has made a good start in the hands of the Society's Secretary, John Payne but needs heritage groups to use it as a way of promoting their events.

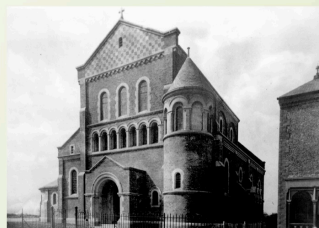


Finally he thanked members for their attendance and hoped they had all learned something new and interesting despite the technical issues that had been experienced during the day.

The Completed Church ...



1924: Fife Road view



1924: Kingsland Avenue View



Sydney Bunney
May 19th 1926



1935 - now with a
Presbytery

The 2024 Heritage Conference was held on Saturday 19th October at the Priory Centre. We hope to have a further conference in 2025, but at the moment we do not have the date or venue sorted. So please keep an eye open next year for when we hold the Fifth Heritage Conference, hopefully bigger and better.

www.coventrysociety.org.uk Email: info@coventrysociety.org.uk