

2019 AUTUMN STUDY TOUR: COVENTRY AND WARWICKSHIRE



THURSDAY 29 AUGUST 2019

Supper, AGM, and lecture: Elaine Harwood introduces the University of Warwick and other twentieth-century universities

FRIDAY 30 AUGUST 2019

Morning: *Coventry Centre:* Cathedrals and walking tour of the twentieth-century Precincts

Lunch: At liberty in Coventry city centre

Afternoon: *Coventry peripheries:* Drive through Canley; visit to the Tile Hill estate including Basil Spence's Church of St Oswald

Evening: Compton Verney House and Landscape

SATURDAY 31 AUGUST 2019

Morning: Kenilworth Castle and Abbey

Lunch: At liberty in Warwick town centre

Afternoon: Lord Leycester's Hospital, St Mary's Church and the Beauchamp Chapel, Court House (Francis Smith of Warwick), and townscape

Royal Leamington Spa: Jephson Gardens

Free evening

SUNDAY 1 SEPTEMBER 2019

Morning: Vernacular architecture in Stoneleigh village and Stoneleigh Abbey (Francis Smith)

Lunch: Vaulted Hall, Stoneleigh Abbey

Afternoon: Stratford-upon-Avon

Guildhall, Guild Chapel & Grammar School, and townscape

■ All arrangements are subject to confirmation.

So you don't miss out, for updates follow us on Twitter @TheSAHGB, and visit sahgb.org.uk to express interest in joining us.

■ Tile Hill is used as a starting point in the paintings of George Shaw, the Turner Prize shortlisted artist, who grew up on the estate. His exhibition, *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, is at the Holburne Museum, Bath until 6 May 2019: holburne.org. If you can't get to Bath, you can watch an interview with Shaw made by our friends at the Paul Mellon Centre for British Art: paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/whats-on/george-shaw

Warwickshire's boundary signs – emblazoned with the Bear and Ragged Staff emblem of the Earls of Warwick – announce *Welcome to Warwickshire: Shakespeare's County*. They highlight Warwickshire's late-mediaeval and Renaissance importance, reflected in much of its architecture. From medieval times, the Avon valley, bisecting the county, sheltered markets for exchanging diverse goods. The Feldon in the south is characterised by nucleated villages amid open field systems, and upland sheep pasture that was, historically, economically important. By contrast, the Arden encompassed the North Warwickshire coalfield and the mediaeval metropolis of Coventry. To the west, the thickly wooded Forest of Arden, familiar from Shakespeare's imaginary pastoral, counterpointed the aristocratic and courtly strongholds of Kenilworth and Warwick, and urban life in Coventry.

In 1043, Earl Leofric and Lady Godiva of Mercia founded the Benedictine monastery of St Mary on the ruins of Coventry's Saxon nunnery. Together with the market established to service it, it formed the core of what became, by the fourteenth century, one of England's largest cities, an important centre of the cloth trade, with an incorporated charter and a county town in its own right. Early modern economic stagnation resulted in preservation of much mediaeval fabric until the nineteenth century, when connection to the canal system aided the local silk-weaving and clock-making industries. Those fine skills underpinned later bicycle, motorbike, car, machine tool and aircraft industries. In the twentieth century, household names including Rover, Armstrong-Siddley, Triumph,

and Jaguar powered the resurrection of the city's fortunes that was both a blessing and a curse: its booming automotive industry attracted the unwanted attention of the Luftwaffe in the 1940 Coventry Blitz. Firebombing killed 800 people and injured thousands; huge firestorms devastated most of Coventry's centre, over 4,000 houses, and the historic cathedral, leaving only a shell and the spire.

Overnight, Coventry's architectural legacy was ruined, making way for extensive mid-century reconstruction. Under the Gibson Plan the city centre was reconstructed with Europe's first pedestrianised shopping precinct. Sir Basil Spence's St Michael's Cathedral was consecrated in 1962. Private and public sector housing developments supporting the booming motor industry included Canley – a prefabricated district. High disposable incomes meant sports and the arts were encouraged, producing an Olympic swimming pool, Britain's first purpose-built civic theatre in 1958, and an art gallery. In 1965 the extensive University of Warwick campus, set among woodland, welcomed students. Coventry's varied heritage has been recently acknowledged in its election as City of Culture 2021.

Based at the University of Warwick – where delegates have en suite accommodation – this study tour aims to give a flavour of the variety of architecture emerging from Warwickshire's history. Four optional focused (formerly pre-Conference) tours explore varied themes. There will be an opportunity to explore Coventry's mediaeval legacy through its churches, hospitals, and domestic survivals informing vernacular construction techniques. Meanwhile, Geoffrey Tyack, an



expert on Warwickshire country houses, will consider how – in northern Warwickshire – landed families have remained in possession of their estates and rebuilt their houses. By contrast, in the Feldon around Warwick and Stratford, spectacular nineteenth-century churches – from G.G. Scott's restoration of the 13th-century St Mary's Church, Temple Balsall to estate churches at Hampton Lucy and Charlecote have been selected for their interest by Chris Pickford, author of the revised Pevsner guide to the county. Reflecting Warwickshire's literary and artistic importance, theatre architecture expert Alistair Fair showcases Coventry's Belgrade Theatre, the Warwick Arts Centre and Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford.



clockwise from opposite page
Cathedral Church of St Michael in Coventry by Basil Spence (1956-62)
© Henry Lawford; Lord Leicester's Gatehouse, Kenilworth Castle (1570s); Lord Leycester's Hospital, Warwick (fourteenth century); Mural by Gordon Cullen, lower precinct, Coventry city centre (1960)

