

Jolly Boys Coventry 22nd August 2019

Due to Rod being unavailable for the recce a double substitution had to be made, and Brian and I were "sent to Coventry"* where we had a very quiet time (that's enough feeble attempts at humour...Ed). Furthermore this took place on the 25th July in record-breaking heat when our railway system was not at it's best e.g Birmingham New St. full of trains that couldn't go anywhere. However the upside was that we didn't attempt to get to the Hastings Jolly Boys on that day, and I hope those that did survived the experience.

* there seems to be no agreed origin for this phrase which somehow Coventry got lumbered with.

History & Culture(?) :

As was often the case in England early Roman and Saxon settlements were added to in medieval times by a monastery, a castle and cathedral around which a town grew. It became a city by Royal decree in 1345. A substantial cloth trade developed which was superseded during the Industrial Revolution by watch and clock manufacturing to which were added bicycle and motorcycles, machine tools, motor cars and aircraft. However despite these changes the city retained many of its medieval and historic buildings. In his book English Journey written in 1933 J.B. Priestley describes it as "genuinely old and picturesque....You peep around a corner and see half-timbered and gabled houses....I was surprised to find how much of the past, in soaring stone and carved wood, still remained in the city." Unfortunately Coventry did not have to wait long for much of this history to be eradicated by the Luftwaffe in 1940, and some of what they missed was taken care of by the re-developments of the 1950s and 1960s, which we were very good at. However there are still small historical areas left some of which we will see on our visit, including the ruins of the original cathedral with it's spire, the 3rd highest in England, some ancient lanes and a couple of nice olde pubs.

Coventry's most well-known person still seems to be Lady Godiva which appears to have been a fairly dubious event anyway, but more interestingly and it's in Wikipedia so it must be true, her famous exploit also gave rise to the term "Peeping Tom". Good pub quiz stuff, that. And another one, the famous scene of the Mini-Coopers being driven through the sewers of Turin in the Italian Job was actually filmed in Coventry, oh yes, as the country's biggest sewage pipes were then about to be installed in the city. Not a lot of people know that!

Itinerary :

On the map Coventry's centre is surrounded by a ring road and the railway station is outside the ring road to the south. Although the walking distance from the station is not that great, due to the haphazard nature of the post-war redevelopment there is little logical pattern and a complete lack of street names when you need them, so use of the buses is recommended. Fortunately these are frequent.

So exit the station and over to the left there are some bus stands. There are screens at the stands with bus running info. Our destination is **Pool Meadow bus station**, the main one in the city. National Express run dark blue double deckers with announcements and visual info on board. Services 8,8A,9 and 9A use stand ER1. We just missed an 8A but further down on stand ER3 there was an 11, which goes to Warwick University via Pool Meadow so we got on that. And I am sure there are others. But check with the driver that the bus is going to Pool Meadow. Waiting time should not be more than 5-10 minutes and the journey time is about 10 minutes.

At the bus station the main exit is over to the right. Outside on the right is a large metallic sculpture called Whittle Arch commemorating the inventor of jet engines, born in Coventry. Across the road to the right of Sainsbury's is Trinity Street. This curves away to the left and leads to Wetherspoon's The Flying Standard, 2-10 Trinity St, Coventry CV1 1FL, a large mock-Tudor (half-timbered) building on your left which you can't miss, walking time 2 or 3 minutes. Leave at 11.00.

Exit left and turn immediately left along Priory Row walking alongside the lovely (and genuine Tudor!) Lychgate cottages on the left and Holy Trinity church opposite. Turn right down Cuckoo Lane. Over to the left are the ruins of the original cathedral, largely destroyed in 1940 although the spire was left intact, with its modern successor alongside. At the intersection of Cuckoo Lane and Bayley Lane is our first pub The Golden Cross, 8 Hay Ln, Coventry CV1 5RF. CAMRA discount available. This is a lovely old pub dating back to 1583, which opens at 11 and serves 4 real ales including Golden Cross brewed for them by Ringwood. As culture vultures might wish to peruse local sights we will have extra time here and leave at 11.45.

Exit and turn left along Pepper Lane which enters a large open area. Opposite are 2 grand buildings for the Lloyds and Natwest banks. These were mentioned in J B Priestley's book. Turn right and enter a larger square called Broadgate which is apparently where the main entrance to Coventry Castle used to be. Ahead is a statue of Lady Godiva. She is facing not the castle but a large shopping area which we have to go through, so we take the descending ramp and soon arrive at an intersection with a fountain in the middle (not working on our visit). Continue across heading toward an ugly tower block at the far end and eventually emerge on to Corporation St. Opposite is the **Town Crier** which is the last pub on our list, but for now turn right, cross Corporation St to St. John's church and left down Hill St. On the left is an old building known as Bond's Hospital but it is really an "almshouse established for old bedesmen" according to Google, leaving the question "what are old bedesmen?" unanswered. Further along on the right is Bond St. and a short distance on the right is our 2nd pub the Town Wall Tavern, Bond St, Coventry CV1 4AH. Opens 12, which after a leisurely saunter from the Golden Cross should be about right. Also CAMRA discount available. This pub has an interesting configuration with 3 possible entrance doors to different rooms/bars. Brian tried them all. Eventually we settled on the 3rd door (on the left). There are 7 real ales split between 2 bars. Apart from a good choice of ales the highlight for me was one wall featuring many artists and their records from the 1960's including some quite obscure ones. No shortage of conversation there! Leave at 12.30.

Back along Bond St. turn right and further down Hill St. on the right is The Gate House, 44-46 Hill St, Coventry CV1 4AN. Opens 11. CAMRA discount? Brian didn't ask. Maybe. There is a nice outside drinking area alongside but by that time the temperature was well into the 30's and it was nice & cool inside, so we didn't use it. This is another excellent pub with 7 real ales and there are local rugby union items festooned around, which Andy should find interesting, including a stained-glass effect on the large window. There is also a basic bar menu and, with a good choice of ales for an extra round, this can be our food-stop. Leave at 13.15 and it's about 5 mins to the next pub.

Retrace our steps back past St. John's church along the very-short Fleet St and into Spon St. This is an interesting street with a lot of old buildings, although it appears that some of these were originally elsewhere but were reassembled here. Sadly a huge tower block beyond the end of the street somewhat ruins the vista. About half way along on the left is the The Old Windmill, 21 Spon St, Coventry CV1 3BA. Opens 12. This is not a recent arrival having been where it is since the 15th (or maybe 16th) century, depending what you read. It's a great place with old beams, stone floors, a big fireplace and other nooks & crannies. There were 6 real ales on with a good variety. Pork pies are available. It also features in a book called Pint to Pint which you may have read. Stay as long as possible.

But if anyone wants to there is, as mentioned above, the Town Crier back on Corporation St. This is a modern Marstons pub, looking like an overly-long bungalow with an Ikea behind looming over it. There were 4 real ales from the Marstons list and several ciders with different flavours. Brian had one of these, rhubarb and ginger I think it was. The heat had obviously got to him.

However this pub is convenient for the bus back to the station. The stops are over the road back up Corporation St. and our old friends the 8 and 9 buses go from stop CS2, the frequency should be every 7 or 8 mins. Alternatively the walk back to the station should take about 15 mins, turn right from the Town Crier and follow the main street, which somewhere along becomes Queen Victoria St. Further along take the fork left along Greyfriars Road until reaching a roundabout then take the road off to the right. This goes over the ring road and the station is ahead. Admire the "concrete-box" architectural style, fully in keeping with much of rebuilt Coventry.

Train Info :

Please note the info below is an indication and therefore you do need to check.

Euston : 6 direct services an hour each way

3 Virgin deps at hh:03, hh:23, hh:43 ret at hh:11, hh:31, hh:51 journey time about an hour.

3 LNWR deps at about hh:13, hh:22, hh:49 ret at hh:01, hh:21, hh:49 journey time an hour and a half or longer.

Cross-Country : direct from/to Reading at hh:15 ret at hh:25 journey time 70-75 mins.

Cross-Country : direct from/to Manchester Picc at hh:27 ret at hh:27 journey time about 2 hours.

For Cross-Country services along the Bristol to Derby/Leeds/Newcastle route you need to change at Birmingham New St. where there are numerous connections to Coventry.

Thanks to Brian for his inestimable assistance and his CAMRA card, and Rod for info on the pubs.
Howard.