

NOTES OF THE SHS MEETING HELD ON 29 November 2022

Apologies: Pam Baker, Shirley and Ernie Ball, Celia Baly, Adrian Clarke

Present: 22 SHS members and 5 guests

Welcome: Sheila made several announcements.

1, The appeal about Tocil Farmhouse had been turned down but Sheila and Jill Kashi had since been invited by the University Community Group to visit to discuss the situation.

2. On 3 December, Sheila was to give a talk on Philip Larkin at 7.30 pm in Stoneleigh Church, followed by refreshments.

3. Sheila had attended a very impressive school public-speaking competition regional final where the theme was 'What does history mean to you?' It was very encouraging to see so many sixth formers taking part.

4. The SHS Christmas Social would be held on 13 December. Members were asked to bring food to share. Wine would be provided. The raffle would be in aid of a local charity and members were encouraged to make suggestions. There would be the opportunity to hear from some members about their own historical researches. (NB. As luck would have it, so many members were ill that the event had to be cancelled.

Sheila then introduced **SHS Member, John Purcell, of the Earlsdon Research Group, to talk about the 'Lost industrial heritage of Earlsdon'**. (This was accompanied by an extensive exhibition of old photographs).

John outlined the brief, but very impressive and varied history, of industrial activity both before and after Earlsdon's adoption by Coventry City Council in 1899. Prior to this there were weavers then watchmakers' houses, mainly in 'Top shops' at the back of houses e.g. in Cromwell Street (now Berkeley Road South). 1891 was the peak year for watchmaking; Arden, Cromwell, Providence and Moor streets all featuring prominently. At that time, 71 houses were involved, representing over half the population of Coventry which doubled up to 1911 with many workers coming from Scotland. Eventually watches were mass-produced and the industry collapsed. Meanwhile, there was a ribbon-making industry and an embryonic motor car and bicycle industry – William Hammond's 'Clarendon Motor & Bicycle Company' until he went bankrupt, followed by the Williamson Brothers' 'Rex Motors' who made a 3-wheeler car at 77 Moor Street (now a GP surgery) followed in 1905 with the 'Rexette' (King of Little Cars) which claimed to be able to carry people up a slope.

However, the site was not really large enough for car manufacturing, hence the Rex Tourist Model bicycle.

The first bike was made in Earlsdon, featuring Fred Allard, a professional cyclist in 1889. Amongst the products were a folding bike and a motorised tricycle.

John made the highly topical point that in 1904 there were numerous local postal collections a day, 7 days a week.

A key personality of the time was Muriel Hind, a racing motor cyclist who won several prizes e.g. Land's End to John O Groats (she even beat two men in one race) and became a key champion of women motor cyclists. 'The Blue Devil Ladies Motorbike' was designed and built at Rex Motors but Triumph beat them to the contract for war vehicles. It was a very noisy factory and employed 160 workers including 8 boys. Rex Acme designed motor cycles with a logo based on the on the Isle of Man symbol. Alpha engineering took over when Acme went into liquidation. Sphinz drinks briefly took over the site. The old Rex site is now diocesan sheltered housing.

1926 was the peak of manufacturing in Earlsdon. With a variety of products, including Harringtons tubular bells. The Caesar Cycle Company, then Clarendon Pressing, used the original bells site but metal bashing was very noisy (initially powered by gas boilers) although the machine tools industry remained important in Coventry for some time, notably Alfred Herbert. One factory site was taken over for sock manufacturing for a short time! A Heritage Trail plaque now marks the site.

Many of the old factories in Earlsdon have been converted to apartments. The site of the old Coventry Technical College in the Butts (1935) is now a Premier Inn but the 3 plaques on the walls have been retained, celebrating Coventry's heyday as a boom town attracting skilled workers from far and wide.

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Sheila thanked John for a fascinating talk.

MSW/1/2023