



Coventry Peace Trail



*A short guide to city centre sites associated with
Coventry as a city of peace and reconciliation*

Coventry Peace Trail

In 1944, the people of Coventry and Stalingrad declared a formal friendship link between their two war-devastated cities. More than a half century later, that Russian city, now Volgograd, is one of 26 towns and cities around the world twinned with Coventry.

The global ministry of Coventry Cathedral, dedicated to peace and reconciliation and active in many troubled parts of the world, has reinforced that pioneering civic initiative. It was strengthened further by the founding of Coventry University's Centre for the Study of Forgiveness and Reconciliation in 1999, later renamed the Centre for Peace and Reconciliation Studies and now incorporated into a larger Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University.

The city, the Cathedral, and the university work together to promote study and discussion of issues related to conflict and peace and to organise events such as the annual Peace Festival held in November each year.

Coventry's willingness to set the past aside and hold out the hand of friendship has given it an international reputation as a 'city of peace and reconciliation'.

This walking tour visits sites associated with peace in Coventry city centre. It begins with the ruins of St. Michael's Cathedral, blitzed in 1940, and concludes in Millennium Place.



The route Cathedral Quarter



The Cathedral Ruins

St Michael's Cathedral was destroyed from the air on the night of 14 November, 1940, the only cathedral church in Britain to be lost in this way. The ruins stand not only as a powerful symbol of the impact of war, but also as a place of pilgrimage, visited by many thousands each year who see the ruins as a vision of hope in the world.



The Charred Cross

At the altar of the ruined cathedral stands a charred cross, a replica of two beams found lying in a cruciform shape in the rubble on the morning after the destruction. On the wall behind it are the words *Father Forgive*, a plea directed not just at the aggressors, but at those who suffered too. A Litany of Reconciliation is said before the altar every Friday at noon, reaffirming the cathedral's special ministry of reconciliation and renewal.



Commemorative Plaque

A plaque unveiled by Her Majesty The Queen Mother during the commemorations on 14 November, 1990, marking the 50th anniversary of the Coventry Blitz. It bears the words, 'nation shall not lift up sword against nation...neither shall they learn war any more'. Micah 4v3.



Reconciliation Sculpture

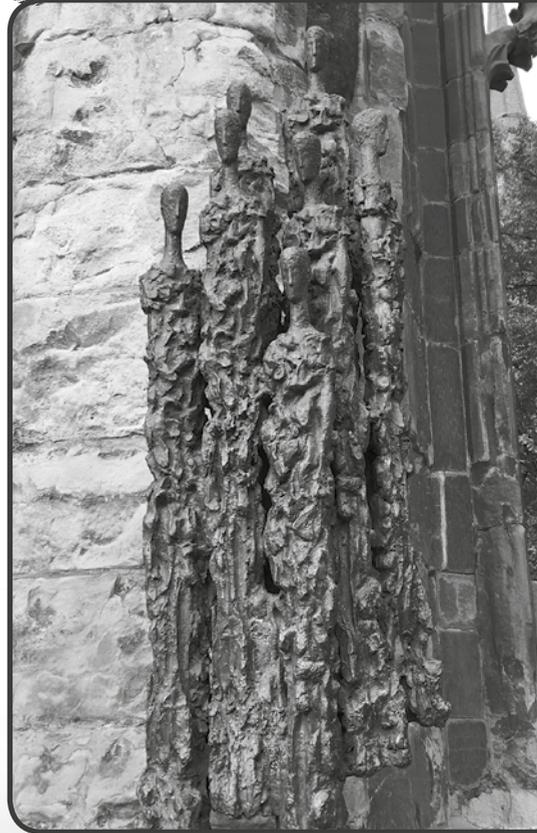
A work by Josefina de Vasconcellos, representing the reconciliation of those divided by war. It was donated to Coventry Cathedral by Sir Richard Branson in 1995 to mark the 50th

anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Identical sculptures have been placed in the Peace Garden at Hiroshima, the gardens of Stormont and in Berlin.



Choir of Survivors Sculpture

A sculpture dedicated to civilians killed or injured in aerial bombing during wars past and present. When the sculpture was unveiled in 2012 specific reference was made to German civilians killed in the Allied bombings in 1940-1945, particularly in Dresden. It is the work of contemporary German artist Helmut Heinze and was donated by the Frauenkirche Foundation of Dresden.



Memorial to Civilians Killed in War

In the shadows of the ruined Cathedral lies a stone commemorating non-combatants killed in war. Brought from the United States of America in 2001, the stone was exhibited in many locations before being installed in the gardens of the Cathedral.



Oak Trees for Peace

A few metres from the memorial to civilians killed in war, just across St Michael's Avenue, are two Japanese oak trees. They were planted by Yoko Ono when she opened the city's peace month on 14 October 2005. On 15 June 1968, John Lennon and Yoko Ono had planted two acorns for peace in the Cathedral grounds. They were planted in easterly and westerly positions, symbolising the meeting of the couple and the union of their two cultures. This was the first of many peace events that the couple would initiate throughout their lives.



Peace Pole

A hand-crafted white wooden pole, displaying the message 'May Peace Prevail on Earth'. More than 100,000 peace poles have been placed around the world in over 180 countries.



The New Cathedral

Chapel of Unity

At the time of the cathedral's consecration (1962), the idea of a separately administered, ecumenical chapel, for use by many denominations of the Christian faith, was truly innovative. Every year on 6 August, to commemorate the bombing of Hiroshima, an event is held with readings and music to remember those who died and to commit to the creation of a world without nuclear weapons. The event is open to the general public and people of all faiths.



The Cross of Nails

The original cross of nails was made from medieval roofing nails found amongst the rubble on the morning after the Blitz. Since then the Cross of Nails has become the symbol of the cathedral's international ministry for reconciliation. A network of Cross of Nails centres exists around the world.



The Font

Sited beneath John Piper's stunning Baptistry window the baptismal font is crafted from a boulder from a hillside near Bethlehem. It was donated to the cathedral in 1960 from the government of Jordan as a gesture towards Muslim, Christian and Jewish co-operation.



Global Candle-stand

This gift to the Cathedral from Kiel was designed with candle-holders for each of the victims, and perpetrators, of the London bombings of 7 July 2005. The candle-stand is a symbol of the cathedral's enduring commitment to sharing together in building a community and future for us all. Kiel, a German city which was heavily bombed in the Second World War, has been twinned with Coventry since 1947.



Stalingrad Madonna

A sketch drawn by German army doctor Kurt Ruber while serving on the Eastern Front – the words 'Light, Life, and Love' point to the confidence of hope amid the turmoil and chaos of war. The original is now in a Berlin church, while copies of the Stalingrad Madonna hang in the cathedral's Millennium Chapel and in Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad) itself.





Herbert Art Gallery and Museum,

The Peace and Reconciliation Gallery within the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum reflects Coventry's experience of war and the city's post-war commitment to reconciliation, exploring themes of friendship, peace, and reconciliation at local, regional and international levels.

In the history section of the museum are some items from the 2-Tone era, created by Coventry musicians in the late 1970s with a black and white logo representing



the desire to transcend and defuse racial tensions in Britain.

The Herbert also has a gallery of paintings illustrating the life and legend of Lady Godiva.

Twin Cities' Plinth

A peace garden was formally opened by Her Majesty The Queen Mother in 1990 and a sculpture and plaque marking that event stands at the main entrance to the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum with olive trees representing peace. A plinth engraved with the names, direction and distance from Coventry, of the city's 26 twin towns and cities around the world, originally placed in the peace garden, now stands in the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum grounds, at the side entrance to the Gallery.



St. Mary's Guildhall

One of the finest surviving medieval guildhalls in England, St. Mary's Guildhall was first built in the 1340s and enlarged and embellished at the end of the 15th century. Its main attraction is the

Great Hall, with its stained glass windows, ceiling of carved angels and rare tapestry.

Coventry's annual Peace Lecture is normally held in the Great Hall.



City Centre

Meschede Way

An elevated walkway near to the city's court buildings. It was named in 1989 to celebrate 40 years of friendship links between people living in the German city and Coventry.



Godiva Statue

Godiva was an historic person, the wife of Leofric, the 11th century Earl of Mercia. Legend has it that she rode naked through the streets of Coventry – covered only by her long hair – to gain a remission of the oppressive taxation that her husband had imposed on his tenants. Godiva has become a powerful symbol of compassion and commitment to social justice, and is the most important civic icon of the city.



Phoenix Statue

Coventry sculptor George Wagstaffe's 1962 work is a personal take on the phoenix that symbolises the new city arising from the flames and destruction of the old.



Dresden Place

Near the Phoenix sculpture is Dresden Place. Dresden was twinned with Coventry in 1956 and remains one of the city's closest links. A plaque marking the square was unveiled in 1974 by the Lord Mayor of Dresden, testimony to the friendship link 'born out of wartime destruction and now devoted to international understanding and peace.'



St John the Baptist Church

Founded in 1344, the medieval St John the Baptist Church has seen much over its long history.

The church hosts a copy of a prayer of atonement, from the Black Prince, seeking peace following his battles in France.

Legend has it Elizabeth I met Mary Queen of Scots here while she was imprisoned in the city to seek reconciliation.

There is also a War Memorial Window which contains the names of those from the parish who died in the 1914 – 1918 War. This is also of historical interest as it uniquely displays the 98 names in alphabetical not rank order!

In the spirit of reconciliation, in 1951 the congregation commissioned, out of their own pockets, an outstanding set of Stations of the Cross carved in Bavaria.

When open, the church offers the St John the Baptist chapel for quiet prayer and contemplation.





Ira Aldridge

In 1828, in the age of slavery, Aldridge became Manager of the Coventry Theatre - the first black person ever to run a British theatre. His performances and the plays he presented led the city to petition Parliament to abolish slavery. He was only 20.

Ira Aldridge broke through the racial barriers. He came to England to escape racism in America (he had been savagely beaten for daring to act in Shakespeare) only to encounter prejudice once again. But he persevered against all odds, performed for the crowned heads of Europe, and has become an inspirational figure for artists from Paul Robeson to Adrian Lester, who recently played Aldridge in Lolita Chakrabarti's drama *Red Velvet*.

The plaque was unveiled by Earl Cameron CBE, (*pictured*) film star, who was taught by Ira's daughter.



Earl Cameron CBE, film star at the unveiling.

Lidice Place

At the entrance to the Lower Precinct, a decorative plaque on a free-standing plinth commemorates another of Coventry's friendship links born out of suffering, this time with the Czech village of Lidice, razed to the ground by the Nazis in 1942.



Belgrade Theatre

The city's main theatre is named in honour of the capital of Serbia, once part of Yugoslavia, which was twinned with Coventry in 1957 and provided a gift of wood for the interior of the new building. On the building's street frontage there is a sculptured relief depicting Belgrade in 1684.



Millennium Place

Opened in 2003, Millennium Place, outside the Coventry Transport Museum, features artworks concerned with friendship and reconciliation on both a personal and community level.

The Public Bench

The Public Bench by the German artist Jochen Gerz is decorated with plaques celebrating personal friendships, placed on the wall by more than 2,000 local people.



The Future Monument

Also created by Jochen Gerz, The Future Monument, is a glass obelisk surrounded by plaques celebrating former enemies that have become friends to Coventry, while a smaller ring of plaques represents many of the different communities to be found in the city.



Coventry's Links with Volgograd

Coventry's links with Volgograd, formerly Stalingrad, were established in 1944 as a result of both cities experiencing the devastation of the Second World War.

The epic battle for the city raged from the spring of 1942 to February 1943. More than 1,000 tons of bombs were dropped on the city and fierce fighting took place.

At the time of the onslaught women from Coventry sent a message of hope to the women of Stalingrad, having experienced the Blitz a few years earlier: 'From this city scarred and ravaged by the enemy of civilisation, our hearts go out to you, who now face slaughter and suffering even more fearful.'

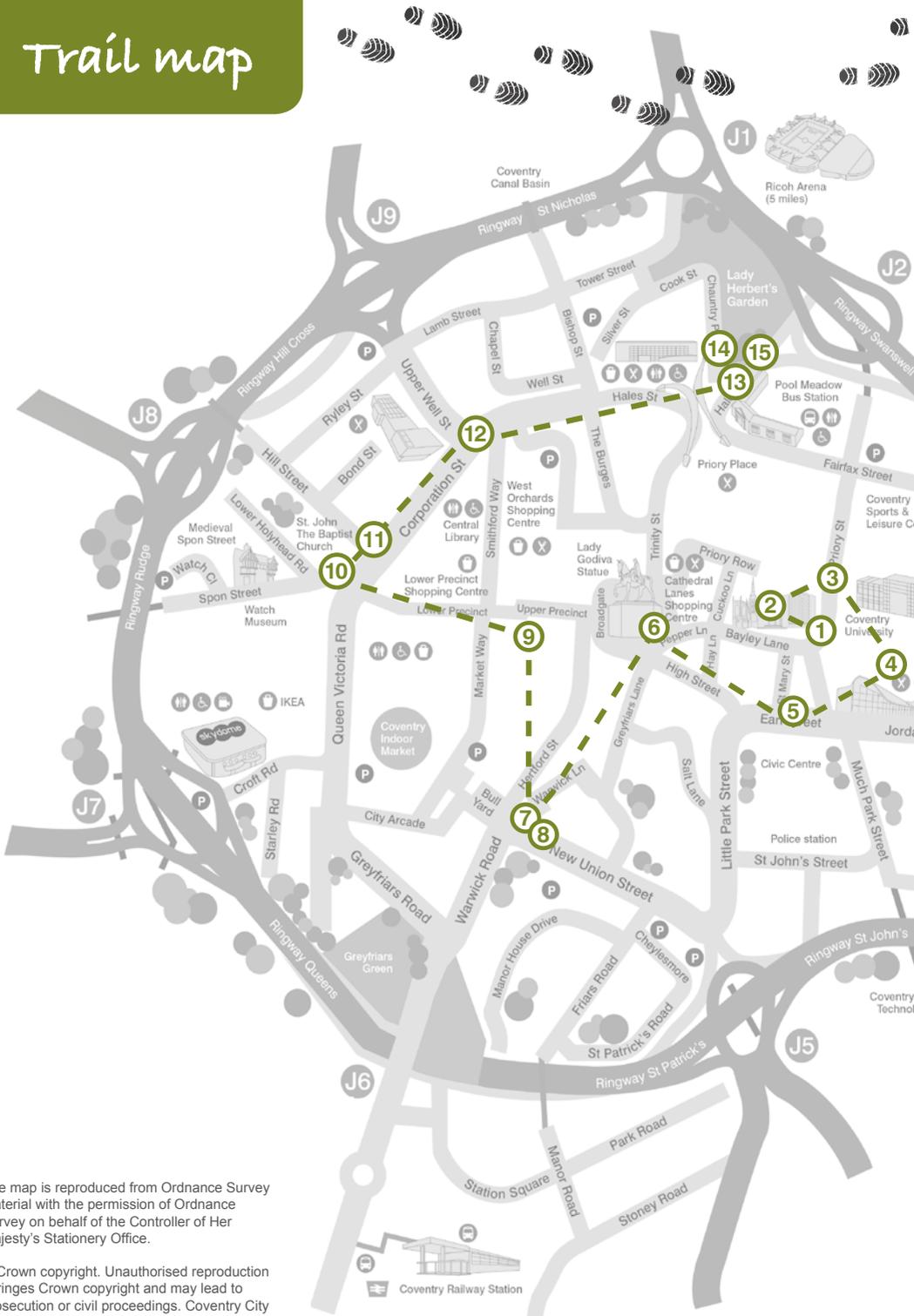
During the Battle of Stalingrad, 900 Coventry women signed their names which were then embroidered on a tablecloth and sent with a message of sympathy to the women of Stalingrad. This tablecloth has an honoured place in the Panorama Museum of the Battle of Stalingrad.

The people of Coventry also sent aid (supplies and medicine) to the people of Stalingrad.

The city's current Volgograd Place (between Lady Herbert's Garden and Swanswell Pool) is in the process of being relocated.



Trail map



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Key

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Commemorative Plaque
Reconciliation Sculpture
Choir of Survivors Sculpture
- 2. Cathedral Grounds**
Memorial to Civilians Killed in War
Oak Trees for Peace
Peace Pole
- 3. The New Cathedral**
Chapel of Unity
The Cross of Nails
The Font
Global Candle-Stand
Stalingrad Madonna
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Twin Cities Plinth
St Mary's Guildhall
- 5. Meschede Way**
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**Coventry Lord Mayor's Peace
Committee, 2017**

