

17 August 2021: First post Lockdown Trip to Droitwich Spa, organised by Jeanine and Christine.

On Tuesday 17th August sixteen members of ssu3a celebrated the end of lockdown restrictions with a day trip to the ancient salt town of Droitwich. This trip had been planned before lockdown and rearranged several times during 2020 in the hope of being able to go ahead. Organisers Christine Webb and myself were hugely relieved when, at last, it happened and everyone at the end of the day said how much they had enjoyed it. Christine had arranged a guided tour of The Sacred Heart Church which despite its unassuming outside appearance, once inside, was a real gem. The walls are covered with the most beautiful religious mosaics rivalled only by those found in Venice or Westminster Cathedral.

David, our guide, captivated us for over an hour and a half with details of the building and explanations of the images made from over 8 tons of Venetian glass 'tesserae' pieces are considered to be among the finest in England. They were designed by Gabriel Pippet and carried out by the mosaicists Maurice Josey and Fred Oates in the 1920s. Pippet was a native of Solihull and died here in 1962 aged 82 years. He was a prolific illustrator and wood carver but there appear to be few if any photos of him. However, David did point out the stone frieze of the Annunciation over the main doorway featuring of course the angel Gabriel but with a little bird sitting behind him – obviously a Pippet, so he had in fact signed his own masterwork! This building is spectacular and well worth a visit.

Our group broke up and went in search of lunch in the town, then reassembled at Droitwich Spa Heritage and Information Centre – which you might remember as the old Brine Baths - for a guided tour of the town. After a quick look at the museums of the town's salt history and that of the nearby Droitwich Transmitter we split into two groups and embarked on separate guided tours. Our guides Jennie and Peter took us to key points of interest which included the historic gas and oil pumping station engine which is still occasionally pressed into use for brine extraction and Staryard Interiors whose owner has lovingly restored the shops interior to how it would have been in centuries past.

We were also privileged to meet Mr John Corbett (1817 to 1901) complete with top hat, tail coat and walking stick. He spoke to us about his life as an industrialist, philanthropist and Liberal Party politician. He is known today as the 'Salt King' and builder of Chateau Impney.

In my opinion Droitwich is a wonderful historic town unknown to many of us as we drive by on our way to somewhere else.

Jeanine Plain-Jones.