

Philip Larkin

9 August 1922 – 3 December 1985

Born a Coventrian and spent all his childhood and schooldays in Coventry until he left for Oxford. Throughout his life he visited the city on occasions. Despite the wartime destruction and re-development, enough of the Coventry Larkin knew remains for a worthwhile literary safari to places, buildings and localities carrying his associations.

This self-guided leaflet is of necessity brief and limited, except for the birthplace in Radford, a good mile north of the city centre, to those locations in the centre. It is aimed at residents and visitors alike, since many of today's Coventrians remain unaware of Larkin's literary heritage.



This former council house at 2 Poultney Road was the Larkin family home from 1919 to 1925. The estate was built on 'garden city' principles and designated Radford Garden Village. Sydney and Eva Larkin, together with their daughter Kitty, were the first occupants.

Philip Larkin was born at home on 9 August 1922 on a night of the full moon. He weighed 10lbs and was born with a copious amount of dark hair. Around 1925 the family moved to a larger semi-detached house at Barras Lane.

Note: The house is not open to the public. It is now privately owned and the owner's privacy should be respected.

Poultney Road is a good mile up the Radford Road (B4098) north of the city centre (on the left hand side going north), across a patch of grass, Radford Common. Catch a bus from Pool Meadow Bus Station.

Further Information

The History Centre in the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum has an excellent collection of Larkin-related material and should be your first port of call.

University archives that aim to accumulate Larkin-related material:

University of Hull Archives www.hull.ac.uk/arc

The Bodleian Library, Broad Street, Oxford, OX1 3BG
www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk

The Philip Larkin Society www.philiplarkin.com publishes a twice-yearly journal 'About Larkin'. Details from The Secretary, Andrew Eastwood, 16 Mere Avenue, Hornsea, East Yorkshire HU18 1RR.

This leaflet can only provide brief, selective information on Larkin's Coventry. Don Lee of the Philip Larkin Society, who prepared the text for the leaflet, is currently compiling a much fuller guide. He would welcome any comment/feedback and especially reminiscences of the Larkin family relating to Coventry, Warwickshire or indeed anywhere else. Contact him c/o the Society's address.

We wish to express our thanks to Henry VIII schoolmaster and Larkin enthusiast Jeff Vent for a generous private donation that helped meet the cost of this publication.

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Philip Larkin's Coventry



Philip Larkin Timeline

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|---------|--|------|--|------|---|
| 1906 | Sydney Larkin (born 1884) meets Eva Day (born 1886) in Rhyl, North Wales. They marry in Leigh, Lancashire (1911), living at first near Birmingham. | 1943 | Larkin leaves Oxford with a first class degree. Returns to the Warwick family home. Writes poems and starts on his novel 'Jill'. In December he is appointed Librarian at Wellington in Shropshire. | 1975 | Larkin is made CBE. |
| 1912 | Daughter Catherine ('Kitty') born. The family move to Coventry after Sydney is appointed Deputy Treasurer. | 1945 | Larkin's first poetry collection 'The North Ship' is published. | 1977 | Larkin's mother Eva dies. |
| 1922 | Sydney is appointed City Treasurer. | 1946 | Larkin moves to the library at Leicester University College. 'Jill' is published. | 1978 | He receives the Coventry Award of Merit, attending St Mary's Guildhall to accept it. This is his final recorded visit to Coventry. |
| 1922 | (9 August) Philip Arthur Larkin born at 2 Poultney Road, Radford, Coventry. | 1947 | Larkin's second novel 'A Girl in Winter' is published. | 1983 | Larkin's collection of book reviews 'Required Writing' is published and becomes a top seller. |
| c1925 | Family move to 61 Barras Lane, off Holyhead Road, Coventry. | 1948 | Sydney Larkin dies. The Warwick house is sold and Eva, his mother, moves to Leicester to be closer to Philip. | 1985 | He becomes seriously ill with cancer and dies 2 December in the Nuffield Hospital in Hull. Buried in Cottingham (East Riding) Cemetery. |
| 1927 | Family move to their final Coventry address, 'Penvorn', 1 Manor Road, Coventry. | 1950 | Larkin appointed Sub-librarian of Queen's University, Belfast. | 1988 | Posthumous publication of Larkin's Collected Poems. |
| 1927-30 | Philip enrolled at Cheshunt Kindergarten School in Manor Road, Coventry. | 1955 | Larkin appointed Librarian at University of Hull. 'The Less Deceived' is published, which quickly establishes his reputation. This second poetry collection includes his Coventry poem 'I Remember, I Remember'. | 1992 | Publication of The Selected Letters of Philip Larkin proves controversial. |
| 1930 | Philip enters the Junior Section of King Henry VIII School in Warwick Road. | 1964 | Larkin's third poetry collection 'The Whitsun Weddings' published to acclaim. | 1993 | Publication of Philip Larkin – A Writer's Life, the first biography, adds fuel to the flames. |
| 1933 | Philip enters the Senior School at King Henry VIII. The school magazine (The Coventrian) publishes his first prose piece 'Getting Up in the Morning'. | 1965 | Larkin is awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry. | 1995 | The Philip Larkin Society formed to further research on the poet, his work and his life. |
| 1938 | The Coventrian publishes Larkin's first poem 'Winter Nocturne'. | 1970 | Larkin collects his jazz record reviews from the Daily Telegraph and publishes them as All What Jazz. | 1997 | 'I Remember, I Remember' plaque unveiled at Coventry Railway Station by Anthony Thwaite, the Society's President. |
| 1940 | Larkin is now co-editor of The Coventrian. Passes for Oxford (St John's College). The BBC's The Listener accepts his poem 'Ultimatum' for publication. In November, Coventry is blitzed. | 1973 | Larkin's landmark edition of The Oxford Book of 20th Century English Verse is published. Awarded Honorary Doctorate by Warwick University. | 2002 | 'Trouble at Willow Gables', Larkin's previously suppressed novel, written by 'Brunette Coleman' finally published. |
| 1941 | Sydney moves the family home to Warwick, due to wartime dangers in Coventry. Philip meets Kingsley Amis at Oxford, leading to life-long friendship. | 1974 | Larkin's fourth and final poetry collection 'High Windows' is published and receives international acclaim. | 2005 | Larkin's Early Poems published, including around 100 poems written in and about Coventry. |
| | | | | 2008 | 75th anniversary of the appearance of Larkin's first published work 'Getting Up in the Morning'. |

Philip Larkin's Coventry



Broadgate

Trinity Street



Hertford Street



Larkin Birthplace



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A HERTFORD STREET, BROADGATE, TRINITY STREET

These three shopping streets comprise the axis of 1930s Coventry and were well known to the Larkin family. They were comprehensively bombed in 1940/41 and when Larkin returned from Oxford to search for his parents after the November 1940 blitz, he fictionalised his traumatic experience in 'Jill', his first published novel. One of Larkin's favourite shops was Hanson's Music & Records in Hertford Street, where he and his school mates who were jazz fans would spend Saturday afternoons listening to, and sometimes buying, the latest releases. Now Etna Italian restaurant occupies the site.

B No.1 THE QUADRANT

A plaque records this as the one-time home of Angela Brazil (1868-1947), author of girls' school stories featuring active girl heroines. During the 1930s she was often seen out and about by the schoolboy Larkin. Brazil's hearty novels influenced Larkin's curious period of early 40s writings under the nom de plume Brunette Coleman. The two stories 'Trouble at Willow Gables' and 'Michaelmas Term at St Bride's', finally appeared in 2002.

C 21 STONEY ROAD

In this semi-detached house with bay windows, Larkin and his young friends used to gather to listen to 1920s dance band and novelty music. The Moy family lived here and their son Arthur was a big influence on the young Larkin, with the older boy's power to create and sustain private worlds. Listening to the music, Larkin progressed to an interest in jazz that became a lifetime passion.

D CHESHUNT PREPARATORY SCHOOL

MANOR ROAD/PARK ROAD JUNCTION
Philip's first taste of school was here, where he attended from 1927 to 1930 (age 5-8) before transferring to King Henry VIII on Warwick Road. Contemporaries recall Larkin attending in a sailor suit and being obsessed with cigarette card collecting, many scavenged from Manor Road gutters. Note: the school building attended by Larkin was not the one currently called Cheshunt but on the opposite corner of the road junction, until recently used as university student accommodation.

E KING HENRY VIII SCHOOL

WARWICK ROAD
This unmistakable red-brick complex dates from 1885 on this site but the tower and the façade are the only survivors of the WWII air raids in 1941. Larkin joined the junior school in 1930 aged 8, transferring to the senior school in 1933. In that year his first published prose work appeared in The Coventrian, the school magazine. By the age of 15 he was composing poetry. Larkin left for St John College, Oxford in 1940. Today the Philip Larkin Room in the school commemorates their illustrious pupil.

F 'PENVORN' 1 MANOR ROAD (site of)

Nothing now remains of 'Penvorn', a large detached house that was the Larkin family home from 1927-1941. The house survived the Blitz but was later demolished to make way for Coventry's 1960s ring road. The home was not a happy one – in Larkin's own words he found 'the atmosphere dull, pot-bound and slightly mad. The trouble wasn't the house but the individuals in it.' Due to the dangers of WW II Sydney Larkin, Philip's father, decided to move to Warwick in 1941.

L THE HIPPODROME

HALES STREET (site of)

This art-deco theatre (demolished for Millennium Place) was a favourite venue for jazz and dance-band concerts from its opening in 1937, having replaced an earlier Hippodrome on an adjacent site (now Lady Herbert's Garden). With Larkin's jazz interests developing fast in the Thirties, he would attend concerts by such star names as Jack Payne, Harry Roy, Billy Cotton, Nat Gonella and Roy Fox. Although he would subsequently change his allegiance to the American giants like Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, he always had a soft spot for 'hot' English bands.

K THE OLD AND NEW CATHEDRALS

off PRIORY STREET

Coventry's best-known and most visited buildings. The infant Philip Arthur Larkin was baptised in the old cathedral in September 1922. 'Philip' chosen by his father after the Renaissance poet Philip Sydney and 'Arthur', chosen by his mother Eva after her brother. Eighteen years after this ceremony, the cathedral was mostly destroyed and the ruins remain as a mute memorial to the futility of war. In 1973 Larkin was in the cathedral to receive a doctorate from the University of Warwick and took the opportunity to revisit some of his old haunts in what he described as 'an extraordinary weekend.'

Old Cathedral

J HERBERT ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM, HISTORY CENTRE

JORDAN WELL

This newly extended arts and history complex has some interesting Larkin connections. The Art Gallery director from 1957 to 1972 was acclaimed Ulster poet John Hewitt (1907-1987), who knew Larkin when the latter was at Queen's University Library, Belfast from 1950-1955. Early in the 1970s when Larkin was selecting poets and poems to be included in his landmark Oxford Book of 20th Century Verse, he chose Hewitt's poem 'From a Museum Man's Album'. The newly extended archive section holds some valuable Larkin-related artefacts, not least the King Henry VIII punishment book, meticulously compiled by the school's legendary headmaster A.C.Burton. Larkin's name makes an occasional appearance for various misdemeanours.

Council House



I THE COUNCIL HOUSE, ST MARY'S GUILDHALL

EARL STREET

The entrance to the Council House (otherwise Coventry's Town Hall) is outstanding. Sydney Larkin, Philip's father, was the City Treasurer here from 1922 to 1944 and had his office on the first floor. Philip was invited into the office sometimes, for example on the Godiva processions through Coventry, where both father and son in true Peeping Tom tradition could better appreciate the fulsome charms of the scantily-clad beauty mounted on her horse. More formally, the adjoining 14th century St. Mary's Guildhall was the 1977 venue when Philip Larkin received his Award of Merit from the City Council in recognition of his outstanding literary achievements, notably the three collections 'The Less Deceived' (1955), 'The Whitsun Weddings' (1964) and 'High Windows' (1974) that have gone on to establish his international acclaim.

H THE GOLDEN CROSS INN

HAY LANE, PEPPER LANE

This 17th century inn is a remarkable survivor and appears as Larkin would have known it. In the then shadow of the Gulson Library (gone), the sixth form Larkin used the pub on three counts, to read the books he'd just borrowed from the library, to drink with his friends and to ogle the barmaid there.

G COVENTRY RAILWAY STATION

STATION SQUARE

Coventry's main line railway station, now rebuilt from the one Larkin would have known and passed daily on his walk from home in Manor Road to school in Warwick Road. The station was used each year by the whole Larkin family as a departure point for their annual holidays. Larkin is prompted to recall his Coventry days when, in 1954, his train unexpectedly stops there. His famous poem 'I Remember, I Remember' was written immediately afterwards and the opening four lines are commemorated by a plaque currently situated on Platform 1 outside the Customer Service Office.



King Henry VIII School