



FEATURE ARTICLE

Discovering the Historic Canal Basins of Stourport-on-Severn



"One of England's finest examples of canal heritage."

On Tuesday 9 June, twenty-two members of Pershore Civic Society enjoyed a fascinating day exploring the remarkable canal heritage of Stourport-on-Severn. Blessed with fine weather and expert local guides, the visit provided a wonderful opportunity to discover how one of Worcestershire's most distinctive towns developed from a small riverside settlement into a thriving inland port during the Industrial Revolution.

Our sincere thanks go to our hosts from Stourport-on-Severn Civic Society, **Paula Rayner** and **Phil Trow**, together with **Gill** and **Shirley** of Stourport Forward, whose enthusiasm and local knowledge brought the town's history vividly to life.

The Birth of a Canal Town

Unlike most English towns, Stourport owes its very existence to the canal age. Before the arrival of the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal in 1772, little more than a hamlet occupied the site beside the River Severn.

The vision of engineer **James Brindley** transformed the area into one of Britain's busiest inland ports, linking the Black Country's industries with the River Severn and opening new opportunities for commerce throughout the Midlands.

Within only a few decades warehouses, inns, merchants' houses and engineering workshops had appeared around a network of handsome canal basins that survive remarkably intact today.



A Remarkable Survival

One of the delights of the visit was seeing how much of this Georgian canal landscape survives.

Unlike many industrial towns, Stourport has retained the character of its original canal quarter, with elegant brick warehouses, historic bridges, towpaths and locks all carefully conserved.

The restoration work undertaken over recent decades demonstrates what can be achieved when civic societies, volunteers, local authorities and community organisations work together.

Pershire Civic Society members found many useful ideas that might equally inspire heritage projects within our own town.



The Ticket Office Museum

A particular highlight was the beautifully restored Ticket Office Museum.

Although modest in size, it tells the story of the canal age through original artefacts, documents and fascinating displays describing the movement of goods and passengers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The volunteers who care for the museum deserve enormous credit for preserving this important part of Worcestershire's transport heritage.



Inside the Ticket Office Museum.

Restored Stables

Equally impressive were the restored canal stables.

Here members gained an appreciation of the horses that once hauled narrow boats along hundreds of miles of canal towpaths.

The careful restoration of these buildings provides another excellent example of heritage-led regeneration.



Historic canal stables.

Perhaps the greatest value of visits such as these is the opportunity to exchange ideas with fellow civic societies.

Whether restoring historic buildings, organising guided walks or encouraging local pride, societies across the country face many similar challenges.

The warmth of our welcome demonstrated once again the enormous value of collaboration between voluntary heritage organisations.



PAGE 6

Looking Forward

The Herefordshire Church Crawl



One of the highlights of the Summer promises to be another of our ever-popular church tours led by architectural historian **Tim Bridges** on **16th July 2026**.

Herefordshire possesses one of England's richest collections of medieval parish churches, many of which remain relatively unknown outside specialist architectural circles.

Our carefully planned itinerary will include churches renowned for Norman sculpture, medieval wall paintings, carved fonts, timber-framed construction and magnificent stained glass.

Along the way members will discover fascinating stories of local benefactors, medieval craftsmen, Civil War damage and Victorian restoration.

Thereafter we have a visit to Bewdley at 2.30pm on 3rd September and a visit to Batsford Arboretum on Monday 28th September – and a talk on local postal legend Rowland Hill on 22nd September at St Andrews.

A Summer full of promise lies before us!

Michael Hodges – July 2026