

## Introduction

Priory Park is situated near the centre of Warwick and is a piece of countryside within a town; a place to relax away from the busy town centre. The park is free to visit and open all day. Much of Priory Park is a scheduled ancient monument. There is archaeological evidence of the land being used over many centuries. Excavations have found remains of Romano-British cremation urns and Norman lime kilns. In the early 12th century, the Priory of St Sepulchre was constructed on the site. The priory remained in use until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536. The priory was demolished to make way for a mansion, which was re-built by the Puckering, then removed in the 1920s. There are few remains of the buildings above ground but foundations are visible outside the County Record Office nearby. The land transferred to the local council and was opened to the public as Priory Park in 1953. The park is now managed for wildlife and biodiversity to protect the archaeology below the ground. Points of interest can be found on the map in this leaflet.

## Trees

There is an interesting mix of trees in the park. The council closed its tree nursery in the mid-1980s and planted an arboretum in Priory Park to use up the tree stock. This has resulted in a number of interesting species growing in the park amongst older trees from the days of The Priory. Look out for these species as you walk around.

### A – Horse chestnut

*(Aesculus hippocastanum)*  
This naturalized species is popular for the conkers that fall in autumn. Look out for the horseshoe-shaped scars on its branches.

### B – Common beech

*(Fagus sylvatica)*  
One of our most distinctive native trees, the beech has a smooth, silvery-coloured trunk and oval leaves.

### C – Sweet chestnut

*(Castanea sativa)*  
The seeds of this tree are edible and can be roasted or ground into flour. Sweet chestnuts were widely planted in parklands during the 18th and 19th centuries.

### D – False acacia

*(Robinia pseudacacia)*  
This non-native species from North America is popular with honeybees. Acacia honey is made from its nectar.

### E – Common oak

*(Quercus robur)*  
This native oak specimen is hundreds of years old and may have been part of a 17th Century plantation established in this area of Priory Park.

### F – Common walnut

*(Juglans regia)*  
Native to an area stretching from the Balkans to Southwest China, this tree produces edible walnuts.

### G – Tulip tree

*(Liriodendron tulipifera)*  
The distinctive dinosaur-foot shaped leaves of this North American tree complement the beautiful tulip-like flowers which appear in late spring.

Carrying on down the hill from the tulip tree, the distinctive autumn crocus (*Crocus nudiflorus*) can be found during autumn.

## Wildlife

Priory Park is a haven for wildlife.

The sound of the Woodpecker can be heard during spring and summer and you may see majestic Buzzards, which nest in the park, circling in the sky overhead.

If you are lucky, you may see a small deer called a muntjac. They tend to be very shy around humans and will run away.

There are many rabbits and their burrows are found in numerous locations.

At dusk, look out for the nocturnal residents of Priory Park. Tawny Owls and red foxes hunt while pipistrelle and noctule bats flit around the night sky.

To help our wildlife, there are 23 bird boxes, three bat boxes and one Tawny Owl box in Priory Park.

## Priory Park Warwick

Thanks to:

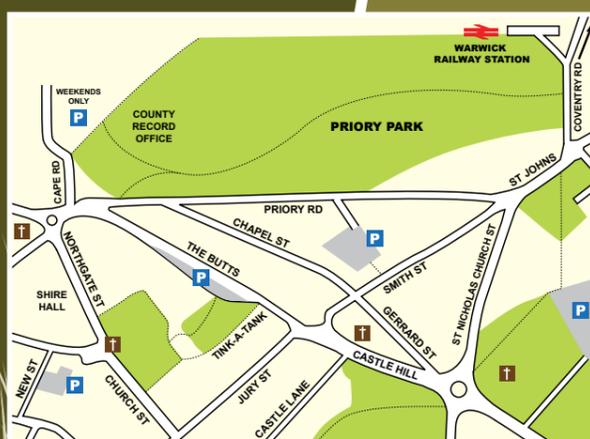
- Diane James "Prayer & Passion" 2001
- The Yale Center for British Art for Canaletto image
- Warwick Tree Wardens
- The Philip Larkin Society
- Steven Falk 'The Native Black Poplar in Warwickshire 2011'

**Priory Park, Cape Road,  
Warwick, CV34 4JS**

Accessibility: A tarmac path runs between Cape Road and Coventry Road. There is a steep hill at the Cape Road end. Other footpaths are on grass and may not be suitable for wheelchairs.

Written with local resident  
Susan Clark 2015

For more information on Virginia House:  
[www.vahistorical.org/your-visit/virginia-house](http://www.vahistorical.org/your-visit/virginia-house)



Priory Park has a fascinating history.

Find out about:

- an unexpected royal visitor
- which famous artists have visited
- the whereabouts of The Priory
- interesting plants and trees.



### 1 Warwick Skyline

From this location, the famous Italian artist Antonio Canaletto drew the Warwick skyline in the late 1740s.

The drawing shows the formal 17th Century gardens in the foreground.

In 1809, John Constable made a rough sketch of the same skyline.

### 2 The Priory and the Mansion

You are standing near the former Priory of St Sepulchre which was founded in the early 12th Century by the First Earl of Warwick, Henry de Newburgh.

The Priory was seized during Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries and sold to Thomas Hawkins in 1546. The Priory was demolished and rebuilt as a prestigious house with 40 acres of parkland.

In August 1572, Queen Elizabeth 1st visited Warwick and Kenilworth castles. She made a surprise visit to The Priory and joined the household for dinner.

In the Hearth Tax of 1663, The Priory had 36 hearths, making it one of the largest houses in Warwickshire!

### Residents of The Priory

Many families lived in The Priory including the Puckerings (1582–1709) and the Wise family (1709–1851).

Henry Wise made his fortune as a gardener to Queen Anne. He most likely created the raised terrace shown in Canaletto's drawing of the Warwick skyline.

The Wise family sold The Priory to the Birmingham and Oxford Junction Railway, who built a railway line through the grounds.

The Lloyd family, who founded Lloyds Bank, owned The Priory from 1865-1935. The grounds had a tennis court, croquet lawn, aviary and fishpond.

In 1925, The Priory was advertised for demolition. Local residents protested but the interiors and contents were sold off.

An American couple, Mr and Mrs Weddell, bought the house. They had the stones – weighing several thousand tons – shipped to Virginia, USA, and rebuilt as Virginia House.

### 3 The Dell

The Dell is believed to have been landscaped as a woodland quarry garden by the Lloyd family in the 1860s. There was a children's play area in the Dell from 1967 until 2002.

### 4 Priory Pools

Now parkland and a children's play area, the Priory Pools were originally fishponds used by the monks. They were filled in during the 1960s.

Philip Larkin, a famous poet whose parents lived in Coten End, Warwick, during the 1940s used the footpath alongside the railway line and wrote about allotments which are still used today.

### 5 Priory Mill and Frog Mill

Thought to be medieval in origin, Priory Mill and Frog Mill were first mentioned in the early 18th Century. They were watermills used to pump water to residents of Warwick. All that remains of their existence are a few mounds.

### 6 St John's Brook

From Priory Park, St John's Brook flows through St Nicholas Park and into the River Avon. You may spot a Kingfisher flying along the banks and the pink wildflower ragged robin grows in this area. On the very edge of the park are some rare black poplar trees (*Populus nigra*).

### 7 Meadows

Meadows were planted in Priory Park in the mid-2000s to help improve biodiversity and enhance the natural feel of Priory Park. Wildflower species include yellow rattle, pignut and meadow buttercup.

### 8 AMIKARO

Two international Scout and Guide Jamborees took place in 1958 and 1979. Seven trees were planted to remember the 1958 event. AMIKARO in Esperanto means 'friendship'.

Three of the original trees died and were replaced in 2012 by Warwick Tree Wardens, Friends of Priory Park and the Warwick Society.

### AMIKARO Trees

- June berry (*Amelanchier lamarckii*)
- Crab apple (*Malus sylvestris*)
- Holly (*Ilex 'Nellie R Stevens'*)
- Golden rain tree (*Koelreuteria paniculata*)
- Cappadocian maple (*Acer cappadocicum*)
- False acacia (*Robinia pseudoacacia*)
- Hop hornbeam (*Ostrya carpinifolia*)



Black & white photographs:  
Publishing copies / extracts  
of items from County Record  
Office collections: PH(N)343/16,  
PH505/21 and PH505/20

- Path
- Tarmac path
- Brook

