



NEWSLETTER No 9

29 January 2006

Societies are invited to send in dates of future events for publication in this newsletter and to re-circulate this newsletter via their own e-mail or distribution systems.

++ The Forum will hold a meeting at The Athenaeum (we are grateful to them for this facility) on Thursday 16 February. All organisations which participate in the Forum are invited to send representatives. (There will also be room for a number of people who are interested but not representing organisations. Anyone wanting to come please email me - see address above). The main purpose of the meeting is to discuss societies' plans for celebratory events in 2007 and to prepare promotional material in which all events can be advertised. Delaying planning for this until the beginning of 2007 may result in missing a wonderful opportunity to showcase Liverpool and its heritage and culture through the work of voluntary organisations. Our work will have the support of the Liverpool Culture Company, the arm of the City Council responsible for the celebrations.

++ People ask whether the Forum is only for Liverpool-based societies. The answer is that it is *about* Liverpool and that if societies in Wirral, Sefton or other areas feel that their activities have a connection with Liverpool, then they are welcome to join in.

++ The Forum is pursuing its plan to make "Meeters and Greeters" available around the city, to assist visitors. This is in co-operation with the Liverpool Culture Company. Let us know if you are interested in helping.

++ This edition of the Newsletter demonstrates just a tiny fraction of the wealth of information about Liverpool "greats" - the amazing number of pioneers and political, cultural and social leaders which this city has produced, surely far more than any other British city apart from the capital. The Forum may be able to organise teams of people to add to the research information which exists and, more importantly, "package" it in a more accessible way than exists now. Any thoughts? Any volunteers? "Who are, which are the top 100 Liverpool greats?", is the question we are asking

Forthcoming events

++ The Archbishop Worlock memorial lecture will be given at the Town Hall by Anne Widdecombe MP at 6.30 for 7 pm on 24 February. Tickets £5 from Campbell Sampson, 21 Victoria Street, Liverpool L1 6BD

++ The Travelling people are playing at a St Patrick's Day Ceili at the Gild Hall in Formby on 17 March. (I am told that these spellings of "Gild" and "Ceili" are correct. The Scots apparently spell their version of these festivities "Ceilidhs".)

++The AGM of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire is at 2 pm on Sunday 26 February in the Roscoe Room at the Central Library. Dr Paul Starkey will speak on "Social work and training in Liverpool". Members and non-members are welcome. (Website www.hslc.org.uk)

++Liverpool History Society has a talk by Brenda Murray on the Rathbone Family (bankers and philanthropists) on 19 March at Hope University, Shaw Street at 2 pm. (liverpoolhistsoc@merseymail.com)

++ There is a Roscoe Lecture by Lord Puttnam at 5 pm on 1 February at the Anglican Cathedral. (Contact John Moores University).

++ Friends of National Museums Liverpool have a preview of the Pre-Raphaelites exhibition at the Lady Lever (open to the public 10 February to 14 May). (Contact 0151 478 4485)

++ T. B. Maund speaks on the history of the Mersey Ferries at 7.15 pm on 23 February at the Maritime Museum. Free.

++ Neil Petersen, Head of Welcome at Liverpool Culture Company, talks to the English Speaking Union on "Liverpool, City of Culture 2008" on 17 March. (Contact 0151 227 3873)

Publications

++ The Liverpool Record Office has reprinted "West Derby, Old Swan and Wavertree" by James Hoult, first published in 1913. This is an excellent account of the heritage of parts of Liverpool including some of the suburbs, packed with interesting detail. One such detail is that when Church Street was widened, some land was taken from the church yard of St Peter's church, which formerly stood where Top Shop is now. Some of the bodies which had to be removed were found to be as hard as stone due, it is said, to water from the mineral spring in St James' Cemetery flowing through this area. This was what was known as Liverpool spa water and apparently had literally petrifying qualities. You may recall me mentioning that when the Friends of St James' Garden had their splendid candle-lit walk around the Garden a few months ago, I drank some of the water, which still flows. I am still here to tell the tale - up to the moment anyway and still not turned to stone!

++ "Plaque by Plaque" was published by John Fidler last November (contact fidlerjb@aol.com). As 25 January was the anniversary of the birth of Robbie ("Rabbie") Burns in 1759, I was interested in the plaque for Dr James Currie, on the John Lewis store. Currie met Burns and published a biography of him in 1800, four years after the poet's death.

++ "World War Two Memories" is published by Liverpool History Society. These include three by current officers of the society (who bravely allowed early photos of themselves to be included!). One story by Marie Whelan tells of the "Franconia", a B&I boat which was fitted out to be Churchill's HQ during the Yalta conference in World War II. It was equipped with a special laundry because Churchill demanded a complete change of bedding every night. Marie's uncle Eddie, a steward on the ship, was disgusted at this extravagance. However, the sailing was delayed and another ship sent in her place. This substitute was sunk by U-boats off the Mersey Bar.

News Commentary

++ It was announced last week that Councillor Mike Storey is to lead the preparations for 2007 and 2008 in the City Council. Cllr. Storey gave a reception for LHF last summer, which was a much appreciated gesture. We shall ensure that he is kept fully in touch with LHF activities. We wish him well with his new role.

++ Gordon Ross is the Culture Company's new Music Co-ordinator. It is hoped that he will be able to help ensure that there is a Hope Street Festival in 2006, despite the difficulties being encountered.

++ Robyn Archer, the artistic director for the Culture Company, gave interviews this week in Liverpool about her plans for activities in 2007 and 2008.

++ It was sad that the Heritage Lottery Fund refused the application for funding for the proposed Museum of Liverpool at the Pier Head. This is intended as a star project of Capital of Culture year, one which will remain after 2008, part of the "legacy" which will keep tourists coming to the city for many years afterwards. National Museums Liverpool remain hopeful that alternative means can be found to finance the project, for which large sums of public money have already been pledged.

++ Radio 4's patriotic theme tune (played daily at 5.30 am!), whose scrapping in April has brought protests, was composed by Austrian-born Fritz Spiegel, who lived until his death in 2003 near Sefton Park. Fritz, who also composed the theme of the TV show "Z cars", was principal flautist of the Liverpool Phil until affected by ear problems - "invalided out by the brass section", as he put it. I think that it was he who first described Liverpool as the "Venice of the North" in the worst days of Liverpool's decline. I visited derelict Albert dock around 1979. It took a high degree of forward vision to see what he meant but he was right.

Editor's chat

++ Anyone interested in the city's heritage knows how few local people have much idea of Liverpool's history and culture. Most don't know that Liverpool had a castle, situated where the Queen Victoria monument now stands at the top of Lord Street. But how about this for non-knowledge? A woman was being directed to the Everyman Theatre in Hope Street. "As you turn left from Hardman Street by the Philharmonic, you'll see a big building at the end of the street. The Everyman is on your right as you go towards that building." "A big building?", said the woman. "You mean the mosque?"

++ www.mersey-gateway.org is a website created by the City Library, in association with libraries elsewhere in the country. It provides access to thousands of images representing Liverpool's history. The original programme of work on it was completed and updating is now only carried out on a limited scale. Members of the Forum have discussed how to provide easy access to facts hidden amongst the enormous amount of historical data about the city which exists. Even those of us who think we know something of the city's history are often proved to be lacking in our knowledge. In discussing Mersey-Gateway with David Stoker at the Record Office, he happened to mention Felicia Hemans. "Who?", I said. "The woman who wrote "The boy stood on the burning deck, whence all but him had fled....". This

poem, properly called "Casabianca" was written in 1829 by Felicia Browne Hemans, daughter of George Browne, a Liverpool merchant, who married a Captain Hemans. Members of the Forum may be able to work with the Record Office to maintain and expand Mersey-Gateway and make its treasury of data about the city and its people over the years more widely known.

++ There is a plan to set up a "Friends of St John's Gardens". (contact Nigel.Sharpe@liverpool.gov.uk) The Gardens, containing fine and interesting statues, deserve to be viewed as an attraction in their own right, not just a way through to the museums.

++ Liverpool Castle again: this really ought to be a central feature of the 2007 celebrations. Can someone make a model of it? (At Duisburg in Germany, the museum has models of the city as it was at intervals back through to the Middle Ages - fascinating. Could Liverpool do the same?)

Can more prominent signs about the castle be provided at the site? There is a plaque about it on the Victoria Monument but it is readily noticed. The castle was probably built for King John between 1232 and 1247 by William Ferrers on the highest point between the Mersey and the Pool (which was where modern Whitechapel and Paradise Street are situated). It is not known exactly what the castle looked like but the layman could get an idea by thinking of Conway Castle on a smaller scale. I see that the sewers in Lord Street are to be refurbished. I wonder what interesting finds may be made. When the building which now houses MacDonalds was built after the destruction of World War II, traces were found of an ancient bridge which crossed the Pool at that point, leading up to what was then a new part of the town, with a new church, St Peter's, and a new street, Church Street, leading to it.

Liverpool Castle was not the only castle in Liverpool. The Earls of Derby had a Tower at the bottom of Water Street, where "Tower Buildings" is now located, then on the shore of the Mersey. For some time, the Molyneux family, who became Earls of Sefton and were one of Liverpool's two great landowning family, were constables of the Castle, so the Earls of Derby, the other big landowners, may have felt that they needed a compensating fortress.

A third castle was that at West Derby, beside the parish church. There is no sign of it now but the adjacent street is called Castlesite Road. West Derby still has the look of a village. The manorial court building has been restored and is to be opened to the public on Sundays later this year. Ancient iron stocks are still there in a little railed-off garden (sadly uncared-for and litter-strewn). The Culture Company wants to ensure that the celebrations of 2007 and 2008 are not confined to the city centre. In this case, they should carry out a survey (plenty of people would help with this) of what needs to be done to make heritage locations in the suburbs clean and tidy and to arrange that explanatory information and heritage signposting are provided.

++ I mentioned in a previous Newsletter seeing a large folder at the National Trust's recently-acquired property at Tyntesfield near Bristol inscribed "Liverpool Art Club". Nobody there could tell me the background. I find in The Athenaeum library some boxes of leaflets about exhibitions which the Art Club ran in the mid 19th century. This makes me ask a broad and general question: "Is there a readable and comprehensive write-up of Liverpool's achievement in the visual arts and music?" The Culture Company's video speaks of Liverpool as an arts city. A vivid account of the city's history as a place for painters would have been useful for both sides in the controversy about 68 Hope Street ceasing to be Liverpool's Art School as a result of John Moores University's plan to build a new Design Academy elsewhere. The same applies to the city's history as a place where great music has been created. Does such a book exist? The city sorely needs this as a tool to support Hope Street as a cultural mecca for locals and tourists.

++ Pressure is being applied to improve the access of heritage supporters to the town planning processes when buildings of architectural or historical merit are threatened. Too often, the heritage lobby only hears of proposed developments when it is too late to consider alternatives. Some of the laws under which developers operate do not help. One is that developers pay VAT on refurbishments but not on new-build. Hence new building is often a more attractive option. A consequence is sometimes that an old building whose façade merits preservation may be knocked down and the façade re-erected on the front of an entirely new building, this being cheaper than refurbishing the old building.

++ It is sad that the Warship Preservation Trust which displays some old warships including a German submarine of World War II vintage in Birkenhead Docks is going into liquidation. The ships, if more conveniently located for tourists, would be a tremendous draw for tourists if they can be kept on display here.

++ Beijing hosts the Olympics in 2008 while Liverpool is European Capital of Culture. Will some link between the two festivals be made?

Andrew Pearce, editor