

A networking organization of voluntary cultural societies in the Liverpool area.

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The Forum

■ On 21 September at the Forum plenary meeting, members heard an authoritative and challenging talk by Robin Riley on sculpture in Liverpool entitled "Unfinished Business". Robin, who has recently become Chairman of the Friends of Liverpool Monuments, showed slides of some of the city's superb sculptures - Liverpool has more than any British city outside the capital. He described efforts at conservation in the past, some of them misguided thereby damaging the works, and said that last year, after decades of campaigning, he persuaded the City Council to have a proper programme of skilled and appropriate conservation. Cherishing these monuments is an ongoing challenge. The point was made that many of the sculptures in the city's streets are superb works of art which merit, but often do not receive, the same recognition as works of art inside museums.

Graham Boxer gave an update of the Liverpool Culture Company's plans for 2007. Eileen Willshaw described the exciting plans for the creation of a visitor centre in the newly-refurbished St George's Hall.

■ The next Forum plenary meeting will be on Thursday 30 November at the Athenaeum at 5.30 for 6 pm when the focus will be on the performing arts. Details later.

Forthcoming events

■ The Friends of St George's Hall have a Dickensian Fayre at the Hall on Sunday 3 December from 2 pm to 5.30 pm. Stalls, entertainment, carols and Father Christmas.

■ The Friends of Liverpool Cathedral have a talk by Alan Mathews entitled *No Epitaph* at the Cathedral on 3 November. Hot Pot Supper. £8.50.

■ Xanthe Brooke will speak to the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire on Thursday 19 October on *The Blundells of Ince Blundell Hall*. At 12.30 at The Walker.

■ The Dante Alighieri Society in Liverpool has a meeting on Saturday 28 October from 10.30 to 4 pm at the Friends Meeting House in School Lane when there will be lectures on *Aspects of Rome* and *Art treasures of the Vatican*. £20 per person incl. lunch. Info: 0151 487 5220

■ There will be a conference organised by IHBC on Tuesday 24 October at Liverpool Medical Institution on "Heritage Tourism". Speakers include John Hinchliffe of Liverpool City Council, Andrew Backhouse, Heritage Tourism Executive for Culture North-West and Phil Reddy, Tourism Strategy Manager for NWDA. Tickets: £80. See www.ihbc.org.uk or call 161 242 1400.

■ The English Speaking Union has a talk at 12.30 on Friday 20 October by Vincent Burke on *The Cameo Murder* (ticket: £10) and a literary lunch at 12.30 on 31 October when Rabbi Lionel Blue will speak. Both meetings at the Athenaeum.

■ Pauline Rushton speaks to Liverpool History Society on 15 October on *Mrs Tinne's Wardrobe Book* at Hope at Everton, Shaw Street, at 2 pm.

■ Liverpool and S.W. Lancs Family History Society (whose journal, incidentally, shows a copy of Liverpool's original seal) has its AGM at the Gateway Centre, Sankey Street, Warrington on Saturday 14 October at 09.15. It forms part of a one day conference hosted by the society's Warrington group. (£14 including lunch).

Publications

■ New publications from Wirral Champion, 2 South Hill Grove, Oxton, Birkenhead CH43 5SH (0151 652 9933):

- *Bidston Observatory, The Place & The People* by Joyce Schofield. The Observatory was originally called Liverpool Observatory. Bidston Hill was used earlier for spotting merchant ships heading towards Liverpool, with a row of flagpoles (the holes for which may still be seen) to signal the identity of the ships arriving to their owners in the city. (£11.95 + £2 Post and packing).

- *Yesterday's Liverpool Pictorial History 1857 to 1957* by Ian Boumphrey. (£9.95 + £2 post and packing)

- *The Liverpool Windjammers – vol 1* by John Richardson (£14.95 + £2 post and packing).

■ Liverpool University Press is offering discounts on some of its publications for a short period.

Out and about

■ In reviewing Liverpool's oldest buildings, one should not forget Speke Hall, just because it is away from the city centre. It was completed in more or less its present form in 1598 but was subjected to internal rearrangement in Victorian times. One interesting feature is the concealed space in the eaves above the entrance door, enabling the occupant to spy on those arriving, a precaution necessary in the days when the Catholic Norris family who lived there feared persecution for their faith. The word "eavesdropping" is thought to derive from such hiding places. The Hall has *Victorian Taster Tours* at noon on selected Sundays. Info: 0151 427 7231.

■ The North West Development Agency, the arm of government dealing many aspects of local life including heritage and tourism, reports that perception of the region both within it and elsewhere is improving. It publishes a montage with the Liver and Dock Company Buildings on the left and Blackpool Tower on the right with a modernistic structure in between - all set among the Cumbrian hills! Nice to have the region's heritage rearranged and packaged like this!

■ Peter Elson of the Daily Post and the Liverpool Echo are campaigning to save the *Manxman*, the last of the Isle of Man boats. Stephen Payne, Wirral-born designer of Cunard's megaliner Queen Mary 2, describes the ship as inspirational. Liverpool City Council has pledged £100,000 towards saving the ship. Donations to the "Manxman Steamship Co" at 7 Wood Lane, Prescott L43 7LN. email:info@ssmanxman.co.uk .

■ I have mentioned our sister "Liverpool" in Canada previously. Now I discover that it boasts a Mersey Point and a Mersey River Lodge. Must have been some serious nostalgia there!

■ The Heritage Lottery Fund is paying £10,000 towards creating a business plan for restoration of the Flaybrick Cemetery Chapels in Birkenhead. Wirral Council is adding £3,700.

■ Urban Strawberry Lunch has plans to open up St Luke's Church as an outdoor venue for historical, cultural and musical events. Websites: www.finest-hour.net and www.usl.org.uk.

■ Liverpool Parks' Friends' News reports that a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £5m will go towards restoration of Sefton Park, including reinstating *Eros*. Email: alan.smith3@liverpool.gov.uk

■ The Culture Company has produced a list of 42 Liverpool anniversaries in 2007. One date, 22 February 2007, deserves more recognition than it seems to get, being the 100th anniversary of the founding of Birkenhead Scout Group, the world's first. Another anniversary is the first documentary reference to the river Mersey, 1,000 years ago.

■ If you mention aircraft dropping things on Liverpool, older people will think of the 1939-1945 World War and the May 1942 bombardments in particular. At an earlier date, 7 July 1919, the airship R33, on a 31-hour endurance flight, dropped leaflets over Liverpool's business district promoting the sales of "Victory Bonds". What would today's anti-noise protesters say about the fact that it had a band of musicians was on board? Whether anyone down below heard what it was playing is a moot point.

■ The Royal Hotel at Waterloo was originally the Crosby Seabank Hotel when it was built in 1815. The following year the name was changed to the Royal Waterloo Hotel and the district in which it is situated took the name Waterloo also. The hotel is a Grade II listed building and retains its Edwardian façade. The management has put up a short history of the hotel in the dining room. This is an excellent idea, one that it be nice to see copied elsewhere. (There was also a Waterloo Hotel next to the Lyceum, at one corner of modern Central Station).

Further along Marine Terrace in which the hotel is situated is a house where Thomas Henry Ismay (1857-1899), founder of the White Star Line lived. Ismay, later Sir Thomas, later bought a house on the Wirral at Dawpool, near Thurston. He had the house demolished and replaced by a new one designed by Richard Norman Shaw (the architect of Scotland Yard in London and the White Star offices in Liverpool). The road from West Kirby to Heswall passed close to the house so Ismay, at his own expense, had a bypass cut through an adjacent rock formation. The cutting thus created is still the main road to this day.

Waterloo has several roads named after men involved in the war against Napoleon. One is Murat Street, named after a French Marshall who deserted Napoleon before Waterloo. There is also a Blucher Street and a Wellington Street.

■ Leeds celebrates its 800th birthday also in 1207 as well as Liverpool. Its foundation was slightly earlier in the year than ours (but it's the quality of the place that counts isn't it, not just which was first?) The Civic Trust is drawing attention not only to the coincidence of dates but also to the Leeds and Liverpool Canal which links the two cities. The Canal was designed in 1767 by Mr Longbotham. The first turf was cut at Halsall by the Hon. Charles Lewis Mordaunt of Halsall Hall. The whole length of the canal is 107.75 miles and the fall from the central level is 525 feet on the Lancashire side and 446 feet on the Yorkshire side.

■ The recently opened Liverpool South Parkway station was built by contractors Edmund Nuttall. Though Surrey-based, Nuttall has had a number of contacts with Liverpool including the building of the Liver Building and the first Mersey Tunnel. The station, incidentally, was built on the former ground of South Liverpool football club. The club made news on 28 September 1949 by playing the first match in the world on a floodlit pitch.

■ The Office of National Statistics reports that Liverpool is now sixth in the number of overseas visitors, having overtaken Oxford, Bath and Cambridge.

FACT OR FICTION? - Take your pick!

■ Did the river Mersey once flow in the opposite direction to its flow today? The theory is that the Mersey was once a modest river running into the river Dee near Chester across the flat land between Stanlow and Chester and that either an earthquake or a shifting of sands at the present mouth of the Mersey caused the river to change its direction around 1400 years ago. "The evolution of a coastline: Barrow to Aberystwyth" by William Ashton (1920) propounds this theory. The Roman mapmaker Ptolemy did not show the Mersey at all in his charts. This could be simply an error, as Ptolemy was said to have worked on the basis of information provided by sailors rather by direct observation. Or it could be an accurate statement of fact. Sir J. Allanson "It was in the sixth century that a great tidal wave overwhelmed parts of Winchester and Rye in Sussex and the land of Lyonesse, west of Cornwall was sunk." The writer's theory was that the land had sunk from 30 to 45 feet in the last fourteen centuries. "The Mersey's outlet to the sea was not, down to a date which may have been anywhere between the fourth and ninth centuries, as it is now, along the pre-glacial depression between Liverpool and Birkenhead but it was a tributary of the Dee, which it joined just below Chester." Picton said that if this was not an error "the estuary of the Mersey in its present form did not exist" at that time. The Chambré Hardman Archives and the Proudman Laboratory website also make references to this theory.

■ Did St Patrick come to Liverpool and preach here in AD 432 on his way to Ireland? Until recently there was a Church called Holy Cross Church just off Great Crosshall Street, between Byrom Street and Tithebarn Street, a notice on the Church wall claimed that this was the case. The late MP for the area, Bob Dunne, was involved in having the plaque put up some years ago, his mother having been the licensee of the pub across the street. After the Church was demolished a few years ago, the plaque was moved into a small memorial garden nearby, where it may still be seen. Certainly for much of the Middle Ages there was a St Patrick's Cross at the junction of Tithebarn Street and Great Hall Street.

■ Does a remnant of a medieval hunting lodge still exist in Toxteth? The building concerned, also said to have an Elizabethan fireplace inside it, is on the corner of Sefton Park Road and Windermere Terrace. Certainly in recent years, an iron gate carrying the letters "1207" has been erected at the entrance. Sefton Park Road used to be called Lodge Lane, being a continuation of the rest what is still called Lodge Lane. It was an early track in the hunting park which King John set up but apparently never visited, despite keeping some staff there. An interesting website www.toxteth.net is being set up for that part of Liverpool. No doubt it will deal with this matter in due course. I see in it that *Toxteth* comes from the name of Toki, a leading Norse warrior, who, in the fashion of his time and country of origin, drove his *staith* (spear or stake) into the ground to indicate where he and his followers should settle.

■ Does the term "Liver" in Liverpool and Liver Bird refer to liverwort, a type of seaweed - a pool full of it and a bird carrying a piece of it in its mouth? The city's armorial bearings are described in Edmondson's Heraldry in 1780 as "Argent, a Cormorant Sable, beaked and legged gulls, holding in the beak a branch of the seaweed called laver, inverted vert." Laver bread is still made in Wales of a sea plant often called liverwort. The cormorant is said by some to be in fact a representation of an eagle, a symbol used by King John. On the other hand, Encyclopaedia Britannica of 1882 says that name Liverpool comes from the Welsh *Llywr Pwl* referring to the expanse of the pool or the pool at a confluence. R. Brooke in "Liverpool from 1775 to 1800" said it meant "Lower Pool". Others thought it referred to a no longer existing type of water fowl. In any case, "The Stranger in Liverpool" (1825) thought that *Lyrpul* or *Litherpul* referred to the whole of the Mersey estuary, from Runcorn to the sea. The Chambré Hardman archive says there were two pools, an upper and a lower, one being thick and sluggish and of a reddish (i.e. liver coloured) hue. Maybe the bird with a piece of laver seaweed in its mouth is the best offering.

Take your pick!

Andrew Pearce, Editor.