



LIVERPOOL HERITAGE FORUM



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

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Celebrating what?

The first of our two years of celebration has begun. What we are celebrating? Lovers of heritage naturally want 2007 to be a reminder of the remarkable achievements of our forebears in this city, a reminder sorely needed, not only among many of our own citizens but further afield, given the lack of constructive information about events outside London provided by much of the media. Yes, Liverpool was there in the Middle Ages, a small fishing village with a substantial castle, predating the castles in North Wales with which we are familiar. Yes, Liverpool did play a part in the English Civil War with royalist cannons trained on the town from the high ground around where Lime Street now is.

Yes, Liverpool was the second city of the British Empire, with a dominant position in shipping and in Britain's trade with many parts of the world. Yes, it had merchants ("merchant princes" they are sometimes called), some fabulously wealthy. Among these were men who sponsored the arts - who gave fine buildings and art treasures on a scale unknown in Britain outside London.

Liverpool and its suburbs was a place of social pioneering - of the first public wash-houses, the first Medical Officer of Health, the roots of the NSPCC and of Scouting, the Nugent Society and other forms of social caring. It had and has a leading role in Church affairs - think not only of the two magnificent cathedrals but also of what drove people to create such buildings. It has one of the finest synagogues in the land and was where the first British mosque was established. The city is a leader in building co-operation between faiths.

It was and is a remarkable city. These things deserve top billing in our celebration of the eight hundredth anniversary of the founding of Liverpool. Some say that the city's cultural achievements only interest a minority - not "ordinary people". Yet at a match in Bordeaux last autumn, Liverpool fans ("ordinary people" unless you happen to be an Evertonian!) raised a banner proclaiming "Pride in our history, hope for our future". At another recent match, fans rhymed "You ain't got no his-tor-y" with "Chel-sea" whom they were playing against. Ken Dodd got applause at his end-of-year show after Christmas for talking people coming to see Liverpool's wonderful buildings "before they knock them all down". These are not the sentiments of a cultural elite. They are what "ordinary" Liverpudlians think - pride in having not one but two cathedrals, in the Liver Building, in the Philharmonic and in the endless list of great Liverpudlians whose influence spread worldwide.

This is not to ignore the Beatles, whose sustained popularity is a truly remarkable phenomenon, but to make the point that there is much else to celebrate besides the Fab Four. Nor is it to ignore the pre-eminence of the Grand National in the racing world or the triumphs of the football teams and the passion of their supporters.

What is the place of the slave trade in all this? At times, the ending of the British slave trade in 1807 seems to be bigger in public pronouncements than the rest of the city's history. The slave trade was a disgraceful episode in that history and one of which we should be reminded. But it is not logical to expect people today to feel guilty for actions in which they themselves had no part. Nor is it fair to ignore the fact that the Africans enslaved were often sold to British slave traders by other Africans. There is an argument that Liverpool's growth as a port in the 19th century was mainly based on wealth created by slave trading. Certainly such wealth was used to create other businesses. Yet would not the needs of the then new manufacturing industries of Manchester and Birmingham for imported materials and export outlets have caused Liverpool to prosper as a port even if the slave trade never existed? And did the wealth of the slave trade alone create the massive infrastructure of docks, railways and warehouses and the city's amazing cultural heritage, most of which arose long after the British slave trade was abolished? 2007 is supposed to be a year of celebration. Let celebration of the ending of that vile trade and the role that Liverpoolians like William Roscoe played in its abolition be part of the wider celebration. There are other occasions to point an accusing finger at those who profited from this trade in those times - and who do so in several parts of the world to this day.

If we get the celebrations of 2007 right, we will have a glorious story to tell to people from many parts of the world who come to Liverpool for its turn as European Capital of Culture in 2008. If we get that right also, we shall have much to show off to the world thereafter - the "legacy" of our refurbished buildings, our enhanced museum collections and the stories of our history fully presented in books, DVDs and on the internet – helping to bring in revenue and jobs from tourism and as a backcloth for persuading firms to invest here. "Ordinary folk" understand this too. It is to be hoped that the politicians do.

Forthcoming events

■ Congratulations to Liverpool History Society for issuing its program for the whole of 2007! The first two events are talks by Neville King on "The Crimean War: Merseyside Connections" on 18 February and by Pat McEvoy on "Child Emigration" on 25 March. 2pm at Hope at Everton.

■ National Museums Liverpool's big event of 2007 will be the opening of the International Slavery Museum at Albert Dock in August. A collection of 22 Viking silver objects found in 2004 at Huxley near Chester is to be displayed at Merseyside Maritime Museum from July 2007. Sudley House, the former home of the Holt shipping family, will be reopened after refurbishment during the course of the year. From 27 January to 22 April, the stunning architect's model of Lutyens' Roman Catholic "Cathedral that never was" will be on display at The Walker. It will be interesting to compare this with the model of an early design for the Anglican Cathedral with twin towers on display in the present Cathedral. (After looking at this, visitors can look up to a small window high up, which the architect had transferred from his mother's house in Wales where it was originally installed). NML has a brochure about its new Museum of Liverpool, due to open in 2010. You can sign up for periodical updates by writing to the Marketing Department at NML via FREEPOST LV7914, Liverpool L2 2JH. (NML info: 0151 478 4615).

■ Port Sunlight Village Trust and National Museums Liverpool produce a joint leaflet about the attractions of Lord Leverhulme's village. As well as describing the permanent display at Sunlight Vision Museum about life in the Village in the late 1800s and early 1900s, it advertises the "Merchant Palaces" photographic exhibition, on from 16 February to 13 May 2007, which gives a picture of the interior design of the homes of Liverpool and Wirral merchants of yesteryear.

■ Liverpool Decorative & Fine Arts Society has a talk on 17 January on "The death of Benjamin Robert Haydon - Painter and Diarist". 2 p.m. at the Bridge Chapel Centre, Heath Road, Garston.

■ The Dante Alighieri Society has a "Martedì Grasso" meal at 7 pm at the Villa Romana in Wood Street on 20 February. Being on Shrove Tuesday, and translating as *Fat Tuesday* this is presumably equivalent to the English habit of feasting on pancakes before Lent begins.

■ The Friends of Liverpool Cathedral also meet on 20 February to hear a talk by Rosemary Hawley, recently awarded an MBE, on her year as High Sheriff of Merseyside. The Anglican Cathedral is holding a Flower Festival from 28 June to 1 July 2007.

■ The English Speaking Union meets on 16 February to hear Dr. A Zsigmond speak about "The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and its aftermath" and on 16 February for talk by Jutta Hesketh about "Art and Literature in 18th century England". (Info: 0151 638 5512).

Around town

■ Liverpool Council for Voluntary Services (0151 236 7728) hosted a meeting last month for discussion of a proposal to install in the city centre a radio system which identifies where the holder of a receiver is located at a particular moment in time and offers a description (oral or on the screen) of matters of interest in the immediate locality. While this could be used for people with various physical impairments (such to indicate where wheelchair access is to be found or places requiring special care by blind people) it could also in theory be used to point out items of heritage interest. A heritage scheme in Liverpool could be operated by use of new-generation mobile telephones or rented receivers such as are provided by many art galleries. The scheme has been trialled in Stratford-upon-Avon on a limited scale, receivers being hired out at £8 a session, but was temporarily withdrawn from use during December due to technical problems. A great idea, but lots of technical and financial problems to be sorted out first. If the scheme does come into operation, it is to be hoped that heritage information provided will be properly checked. The information panel in Derby Square has a ground plan said to be of the Castle, whereas it is in fact a plan of the town as a whole, including the Castle.

■ Three heritage enthusiasts were kindly invited by the management of 62 Castle Street, (the former Trials Hotel converted into a very well-appointed niche hotel) to visit the sub-basement there. The present building was built in late Victorian times as a bank and seems to have been fitted in to Liverpool Castle's moat, which had been filled in the early 18th century. The sub-basement is brick-lined so there is no sign of the stone from which the moat was cut but the Archaeology Service has plans drawn after an excavation in 1927 which show where the moat was. Interestingly, at one point, the sub-basement projects out from the building line under the pavement of Castle Street.

■ The former Liverpool Observatory building at Bidston is up for sale again. If Wirral Council can be persuaded to demand that the building be preserved in some way which enables visitors to appreciate its remarkable history in the making of tide tables used all over the world, this would show that it has accepted that heritage does have an economic value - a means of attracting tourists, who spend money in the locality - after the debacles over the warships and the attempt to authorise the building of a supermarket to block the view of New Brighton's Fort Perch Rock.

■ Visitors to Liverpool should always be told about Speke Hall. Yes, we DO have a magnificent Elizabethan building with the city boundaries! An add-on to a visit to it would be the new Speke & Garston Coastal Reserve between the airport and the river. From the main Speke Road, turn in to Banks Road then straight on into Blackburne Street. It is interesting to see the great river looking a bit more like it must have looked to our ancestors than it does today at Tranmere or Bootle.

■ People recognised by Liverpool Culture Company as "stakeholders" received a large Christmas card which lists activities celebrating Liverpool's 800th anniversary throughout 2007. More info of www.liverpool08.com or 0151 233 2008. Discussions are to be held with the Culture Company about who are entitled to be recognised as stakeholders and so receive this sort of information and also invitations to briefing meetings such as that in St George's Hall on 12 November. (This latter meeting unfortunately clashed with two other events which might have attracted the same people.)

■ Alison Hastings, a media adviser to Liverpool City Council, has been appointed as one of the new Trustees of the BBC. Let us hope that she can swing the Corporation towards a better balance in its coverage between London and the English provinces, including Liverpool.

Stop the Rot

The campaign met on 11 December under the chairmanship of the Editor of the Echo, which runs the campaign. Reports were given about plans to bring back into use for some purpose or another, buildings such as the Tobacco Warehouse, Newsham Park Hospital, the White House pub and various buildings in Seel Street, Duke Street and Slater Street. On most, but not all, of these, progress is being made, due to co-operation between the City authorities and the site owners and developers, pushed by the Stop the Rot Campaign (led by the Bishop as well as the Echo), the Save our City Campaign, English Heritage and others. Yet an outsider would scream in frustration at the time it takes to do anything and at the procedures, most of them dictated by national policies, which have to be completed, even when the will to do something is there, which, fortunately, it is in many cases.

It was a particular pleasure to be reminded that the Florence Institute ("The Florrie") was given a boost in September of £3.9m, of which a portion can hopefully be accessed during the course of this year for preliminary work. Campaigners are looking for another £1.5m. The building was built in 1839 by Sir Bernard Hall in honour of his daughter "to provide a place of instruction and recreation for the poor and working boys of this parish". Gerry Mardsen played his first gig there. When renovation is complete, the building will house an auditorium, a café, a library and a heritage resource centre. The money-raising is still a daunting task but progress to date reflects huge credit on the people, leading the campaign and proves that local effort really can bring results and that parts of the city outside the central area have heritage to cherish and show off.

The Editor abroad

Your editor went to Hamburg last month to see how the Germans do things. The late 19th century Town Hall there is very large ("more rooms than Buckingham Palace"), beautiful and very well looked-after. On a Sunday, groups of about 50 people (at £1.50 a time) are taken round at regular intervals, some of them having English-speaking guides. Business was very brisk, no doubt swollen by the Christmas Market outside. The building is fully functional as the meeting place for two "Houses", Hamburg being not only a City but also a State within the German Federal system. SPQH is inscribed on a statue rather as SPQL may be seen in St George's Hall in Liverpool. These derive from the SPQR of ancient Rome (*Senatus Populusque Romanus*, the Senate and People of Rome), referring to the joint exercise of power by the traditional "top people" in the city and its "ordinary" folk. Maybe our own Town Hall could equally become a big tourist attraction. The local public transport undertaking's website gives a write-up the history of its metro network.

I dined on Labskaus, from which our word "scouse" comes. This was potato, onion, gherkins, corned beef and beetroot fried together and served with a raw herring and a fried egg. I bought a tin of it at the airport. Lady Hooper of Liverpool, once MEP for the city, published a recipe for scouse years ago, using mutton and "any root vegetables" and simmering it "for at least two years and after that indefinitely". To be served with beer, bread and cheese, she advised.

I also visited Lübeck, which has ancient walls and gates and a lovely cathedral. The lady in the Cathedral complained about how the City Council there contributed nothing to the upkeep of the Cathedral although it is the main reason why people visit the city outside the summer period. But in Germany, citizens can sign up to have 7% or 8% deducted from their salaries with their income tax, the money going to the church of their choice. But not all church-goers sign up!

Andrew Pearce