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

## NEWSLETTER No 35

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### Looking back on the summer of 2007 – the city's 800<sup>th</sup> year

#### **Two cheers for the celebration of Liverpool's 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary day**

We are drawing to the end of Liverpool's 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. There were two climaxes during August. The most important was the parade and other ceremonies on 28 August. The dancers and people on stilts were magnificent. The compère, Pete Price was superb, the crowds were adequate. Full marks to these.

But where were the people who could have represented the civic services and local businesses? Why was there not a single celebratory banner the entire length of Church Street and Lord Street (although the Athenaeum in Church Alley did have one - good for them!). It's what has been said so many times before - the Culture Company has simply not engaged the city as a whole in the celebrations. Have these people never seen a city "en fête"?

But blame not just the Culture Company. Do the cities' shops not feel involved? Why did the Chamber of Commerce not take a lead? Although there is still no sign in the shops of any celebration of 2007 or preparation for 2008, there are rumblings that something is now going to be done in this regard. We look for "Welcome" signs in shop windows, flags on the buildings (including the European flag as 2008 will be EUROPEAN Capital of Culture year). Surely it is in the interests of businesses to play an active part. Let's look festive in 2008!

#### **Celebrating the end of the slave trade, not just complaining about its evils**

What of 23 August, the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abolition of slavery? The service at St Nick's was moving. There was a festive feeling, if of modest size, at Otterspool. There were three musicians (drummers). The speeches sought, rightly, to remind us of the horrors of the slave trade, in which Liverpool played a significant part, but said little about the slavery which continues to this day in several parts of Africa and Asia or of the appalling conditions in Zimbabwe and Dafur. In any case, 2007 was supposed to be a year of celebration, not complaining - in this case celebrating the ending of the slave trade, in which Liverpool also played a significant part.

#### **The Matthew Street fiasco**

Then we had the fiasco of the cancellation by the Culture Company of the Matthew Street - and the rescue of part of it due to the determination of local businesses under the lead of the Chamber of Commerce.

#### **Blood-letting in the Culture Company - more needed?**

The knives came out. The Chairman of the Culture Company, Professor Drummond Bone was demoted and replaced, in effect, by Phil Redmond, whose hand can already be seen on the tiller and who is at least physically in the city most of the time and able to attend to the business of the Culture Company.

At the time of writing, Jason Harborough is still in post. His public reputation is so damaged that it is difficult to see how his leadership of the Culture Company's staff in the future can ever climb back into public respect.

**Who's in charge?**

Finally, the Councillors. Currently, Mike Storey has some responsibility for he celebrations and was Council Leader when some of the tragic appointments which have led to the current mess were made. Warren Bradley is now Council Leader but it is still hard to see who is really in charge. (The Culture Company's Chairman, Bryan Gray, who heads the North West Development Agency, is presumably there to provide a steadying hand rather than to provide leadership, that apparently being Phil Redmond's job). Councillor Bradley has to see that this is the biggest political test he may ever have. Get this wrong, and his political name will be mud. Yet in the summer, with the Culture Company in seeming complete disarray, he found time to speak at the LibDem's national conference and to engage in the problematic campaign to provide a site on Scotland Road for Everton football club.

Councillor Bradley and Councillor Eddie Clein and others have both appealed to the to be positive, to "let the deliverers deliver", to be confident that 2008 will be a success, to dialogue with the Culture Company, not just criticise it in the press. It would be nice if that could be. But the Culture Company's failure to provide any response at all to letters addressed to it was and is notorious. How can one dialogue with a brick wall? We waited for the "deliverers to deliver" and look what we got - the Australian lady (whose name we are happy to forget) who was supposed to run the events, the Matthew Street fiasco and a widespread feeling of a large element of the local population of being kept out of things - a sentiment which it will be very difficult to remedy.

**2008 can still be a success**

We are aware informed a large program of first quality events awaits us. We have a new hand at the helm, Phil Redmond. The first stirrings of the city's traders to "do something" about 2008 are apparent. The visitor facility in St George's Hall is excellent and attracting large numbers of visitors. The Arena and Conference Centre at Albert Dock is more or less on time and will be a first-rate addition to the city's ability to attract visitors. The refurbishment of Church Street is nearing completion (marble facings are recently appearing round the concrete boxes containing the trees, for instance). The Cathedrals and the Phil have exciting programs. Cruise liners have arrived. The Big Dig is proceeding and, while being an inconvenience to getting about the city, is a welcome testimony to the city's rebirth. Even the toilets at Lime Street station are being renewed!

**Keeping an eye on the ball**

Most of the ingredients of success are there - if the Culture Company and the City Council get their act together. They need renewed leadership with a clear chain of command and a determination to include the people of Liverpool in what is going on if they are to succeed. They must keep their eye on the ball - something which was very evidently not happening previously.



## Liverpool Heritage Forum going forward

The Forum's steering group at a meeting in the near future will be reminding itself of what it set out to do and of what it has achieved. A future Newsletter will report in this but we are confident that the Forum has had some success in spreading information about events taking place and a measure of success but some failures also in persuading the Culture Company to do more to recognise the work of voluntary organisations in the city. The Forum's task for 2008 will be to endeavour to make visitors to Liverpool aware of the vibrant activity of heritage and voluntary societies.

## Museum news

- A stunning aerial view oil painting showing the Liverpool waterfront at the height of the city's prosperity 100 years ago has been acquired by Merseyside Maritime Museum, part of National Museums Liverpool (NML). *Modern Liverpool 1907* by Walter Richards shows existing buildings and some that were only planned when the painting was done. It captures the bustling atmosphere of the port when it was the Second City of the British Empire, celebrating its 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary. A Cunard liner which could be either the *Mauretania* or her ill-fated sister *Lusitania* is moored at the Prince's Stage while smaller ships and ferries can be seen nearby. The Liver Building is depicted although it was not completed until 1911. Other buildings unfinished when the painting was done include the Anglican Cathedral – shown with twin towers as originally planned.
- NML has been awarded £220,000 by DCMS/Wolfson to improve and interpret some of Liverpool's most important historic docks and quaysides. Due to open in July 2009, the project will use new technology to bring to life the heart of Liverpool's World Heritage Site. A visitor attraction in its own right, it will link the Merseyside Maritime Museum and the new International Slavery Museum with the forthcoming Museum of Liverpool, opening 2010. The Friends of National Museums Liverpool have pressed for this for some time.
- The Friends of NML recently hosted the annual national conference of the British Association of Friends of Museums at the Maritime Museum. The weather was perfect and the city's buildings looked magnificent. The Magical History Tour exhibition (Liverpool's history) and the new international slavery gallery (both at the Maritime) were among the top-grade exhibitions which the delegates saw. A good many of the 100+ delegates, many of whom had never been to Liverpool before, said they would come here again.

## Recently

- The Big History Show in St George's Hall organised, by BBC Radio Merseyside in September, drew large crowds to excellent displays. No doubt it will be repeated in 2008 but wouldn't it be nice if the displays could be on show somewhere in a limited format for the whole of the summer?
- The first of what is to be an annual Liverpool Shakespeare Festival featuring "Macbeth" was held in the Anglican Cathedral with the second half (when the weather was fine) in St James' gardens behind it - a near perfect location for drama. Next year "A Midsummer Nights Dream" will be produced. ([www.TheLiverpoolShakespeareFestival.co.uk](http://www.TheLiverpoolShakespeareFestival.co.uk))
- A retired joiner from Rainhill believes that his family is the oldest in Liverpool. Grandfather-of-six Anthony George says he has proof of his Liverpoolian lineage going back to 1843. He was a VIP guest at the celebrations on August.
- A maquette or small model of Edward Cronshaw's 'The Great Escape' - the rearing horse sculpture that originally stood at the top of Church Street - was on sale at an antique shop in West Kirby a few weeks ago at an asking price of £1,200. We haven't heard whether this interesting piece of local history has been purchased.
- Liverpool's Athenaeum has produced a list of nineteen of its most notable members over the years. It will be on the club's website.

- Who would have believed twenty years ago that Liverpool would feature in travel brochures? Yet Tailored-Made Travel advertise a 5-day coach tour from London aimed at National Trust members, taking in Shugborough, home of the Earls of Lichfield, the Tate Liverpool, the Walker, Port Sunlight village, the Lowry and the Whitworth in Manchester and Charlecote in Warwickshire.
- A recent visitor to the Town Hall noticed that there is a commemorative panel in the hallway about the city's 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary but not about the 800<sup>th</sup>. Why is this? Will the Town Hall be more open to visitors in 2008 than this year?

### **Future happenings**

- The annual Maritime Carol Service will be held at the Church of Our Lady and St Nicholas ("St Nick's") at 6.30 p.m. on Thursday 13 December. This is a major occasion for many who have been involved in Liverpool's maritime life.
- Joe Riley, Art Editor of the Echo, will give a Roscoe lecture in St George's Hall on Wednesday 31 October at 5.00 p.m. His topic is "Does Liverpool deserve to be European Capital of Culture?". Tickets (free) from 0151 231 3852.
- Merseyside Tramway Preservation Society has its AGM at 8 pm on Monday 19 November at the Ship and Mitre in Dale Street. Tickets for the society's Santa Specials on Saturday 15 December and for a tram service on the previous evening can be booked via the society's website. The society reports that David Cottrell has published a book listing most of the places where you can see Liver Bird images. One such location is on a lighting standard in Princes Boulevard.
- One of Liverpool's Sunday City Walks will take place on 2 December at 2 pm. Topic: The Pool of Life - to celebrate Liverpool's success story in public health.
- Liverpool University will run six free lectures in Liverpool Cathedral starting in April 2008 on Liverpool's culture. For real culture vultures, the University runs a program of courses including, for example, one on the Italian States from 1494: the era of Machiavelli and Castiglione.

### **Archaeology in Wirral**

Archaeology experts fear hundreds of historic relics in Wirral are being lost under new development. They say not enough is being done to check for relics and unless more funding can be found, important heritage sites will be destroyed. Landscape archaeologist Jenny Whalley, who chaired Merseyside's Archaeological field group for more than 20 years, claims more needs to be done to save Wirral's heritage. She said: "A string of new developments is going up yet no-one is properly taking account of the history that is being destroyed. There is some help from Liverpool Museum but nothing Wirral specific. Ancient roads are built over or destroyed. We have also found ancient carvings at Bidston that are being rubbed away, and we can't get these protected." Wirral Council points out that it has recently led the formation of a new advisory group, the Friends of Wirral History and Heritage, with representatives of most historical societies and trusts in the borough.

*Andrew Pearce*