

Liverpool Cultural Heritage Forum

Web Site: www.liverpoolheritageforum.org.uk

Email: info@liverpoolheritageforum.org.uk

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THE FORUM

The Forum held a successful meeting on 30 November at the Byrom Street building of Liverpool John Moores University. (Our thanks to them). There were talks about the work of the [Phil](#), the [Daniel Adamson Preservation Society](#), the [Friends of Williamson Tunnels](#), the [Metal arts project](#) at Edge Hill station, [Merseyside Archaeological Society](#) and [Merseyside Civic Society](#). The enthusiasm of the people running all of these activities shone out. They have important achievements to their credit, whether in presenting aspects of the fine and performing arts, the city's physical heritage, and in increasing the body of knowledge of the city's history in the form of documentation. You will not need reminding that a good deal of what we know and can see of Liverpool's heritage and arts is entirely the result of the efforts of voluntary groups. We trust that those who run the professional and commercial side of culture in the city are aware of this.

CONSERVING AND IMPROVING OUR BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Merseyside civic society heard a talk by Henry Owen-john about the likelihood of a heritage bill coming before Parliament during the next year or two. It is likely to integrate the rules or the protection of heritage buildings and monuments, oblige local councils to look after heritage records and introduce a system to appeal against English Heritage proposals on listings. In particular, it will be possible for buildings to be protected against being demolished or defaced while proposals for listing are being considered. This is very important for Liverpool in view of the past activities of certain developers. About two thirds of the changes which are in the draft White Paper do not in fact need to wait for legislation. Local councils are already permitted to set up local lists of protected buildings. Half of the local authorities in England have done so. Liverpool has not. The meeting also heard Tony Burton describing plans for a successor organisation to the Civic Trust. A consultation is under way to set up a national body for England which local civic societies could join at a cost of between £1 and £3 per member which would lobby government, provide expert advice and arrange for the sharing of information. It would be a low cost organisation and would be responsive to the views of its members - and not, hopefully as dominated by London interests as many national organisations are.

[The Wirral Society](#) seeks to be properly consulted in the design of Wirral Waters. Two modest tower blocks have been approved, which the society fears could ease permission for multiple blocks 40 storeys high. Of course they would not be the first tall structure be seen across the river from Liverpool. The Tower is New Brighton, similar to and slightly taller than Blackpool Tower, was taken just after becoming unsafe due to lack of maintenance during world War I, s story repeated one world war later with the demise of the Overhead railway along he docks for similar reasons.

[Wirral History and Heritage Association](#) is proposing to take over the management of Birkenhead Town Hall. It points out that heritage is an issue which touches everyone's quality of life as well affecting planning and tourism. It could also be pointed out that cultural tourism is one of the few potential growth areas for employment in Merseyside and should be viewed as an economic policy as well as something for the enjoyment of local people. The Town Halls of northern England are among the region's great glories. The proximity of Birkenhead Town Hall to the Priory, the Pump House, the trams and the ferry terminal add up to a useful tourist attraction.

HERE AND THERE

The city centre was very welcoming on Thursday evening. The Formby Band played carols, there were real deer in a pen, fake snow falling, a Christmas tree glittering, lots of happy children and a man dressed as a polar bear, apparently with a broken neck (the polar bear, that is!).

Our masters in the Council Chamber are intent in making Liverpool a 24-hour city. It seems to be working. A passenger of the last train from Chester to Liverpool one night heard some girls saying they were going clubbing in Liverpool. He thought he would warn them that they would miss the last train back to Chester. No problem, they said. They were planning to get the first train out of Liverpool in the morning.

It is always nice to receive compliments from the other end of the East Lancs Road. An article in Big Issue North quotes Ian Brown of pop group Oasis as saying "I love Liverpool and Glasgow. Liverpool's probably the best place to play".

[St James](#) in the City (Upper Parliament Street) was re-opened on 29 November as an active church, particularly for young people. The Bishop of Liverpool presided in a tent installed inside the church (to keep water and dirt falling from the ceiling). A consultation meeting is to be held about further development of the building, for church purposes and as a social centre, in the Concert Room of the Anglican Cathedral 5.45 to 7.30 on Monday 7 December. Let them know of you will attend on livserve@googlemail.com

We have linked to our website a site remembering people from two world wars in connection with research at St Anthony's, Scotland Road. See <http://www.anthony1965.webs.com/> and www.freewebs.com/eldonmemww1/

We are still amazed at the transformation in Liverpool's' docks. Who would have believed twenty years ago that a heritage apartment at the Albert Dock would be on sale for £695,000?

It's good to see artists and musicians with Liverpool connections making headway. Victoria Gotham is a drama tutor at the Regent theatre at Stoke on Trent. She trained at Liverpool Institute for the performing arts and has featured in TV commercials for the Co-op Bank and Iceland. Kathryn Rudge, winner of the Merseyside Young Singer of the Year award in 2004 is at the Adelphi Hotel on 19 December. She sang at Clonter opera near Congleton last month.

The Treasure House at the Roman Catholic Cathedral is worth a visit. There is little medieval silver or gold there (or anywhere else in England thanks to Henry VIII) but an ancient chalice found at Lydiat and a bronze cross found at Gillmoss are on display. There are some fine nineteenth century articles and some magnificent vestments.

Liverpool boasts the only permanent display of classic Edwardian and Victorian embroidery in the country. At the Anglican Cathedral.

Book 3 of the Liverpool heroes series has been published by the Noel Chavasse Memorial Association. It described the deeds of 17 Liverpool holders of the Victoria Cross.

A further point from the Phil's AGM, which we reported in the last edition was about the dress of the orchestra, particularly the men. At certain concerts, the formal black tail coats and bow ties are replaced by open neck black shirts and no jackets. A shock for traditionalists, a welcome updating for other people. It's worth noting that musicians in the time of Bach or Beethoven could not have worn what we have come to regard as the "natural" style of dress to be worn because it had not been invented in their time. Yet another point of this very interesting meeting was that while Liverpool City Council gives £110,000 annually to the Phil, the other four Merseyside boroughs only give about £25,000 each. If the citizens want Wirral, Sefton and so on to pay more to safeguard this wonderful asset, they should tell their councillors. An interesting point about the Phil is that Members' AGM has the task of approve the Phil's annual accounts. Thus, the Members are fully integrated into the running of the Society. This is in contrast with certain other large cultural organisations which seek to keep their Friends very much under the thumb of the management.

As it appears that National Museums Liverpool intends to leave its collection of Liverpool pottery permanently in storage, (being an aspect of Liverpool's historical greatness, which does not seem to fit the NML's current policy which seems more focussed on the negative points of the city's history) would NML agrees that its should be displayed somewhere else. NML cannot be allowed to hide the city's achievements because a particular trustee official wishes to ventilate particular political views. The Echo reported on 29 September that the Bishop of Liverpool was among three new Trustees at National Museums Liverpool. His name however does not appear on the list of trustees on the NML website.

We will continue to speak of the shortage of opera in Liverpool. The Glyndebourne touring company visits Stoke on Trent, a fine city no doubt but not one with Liverpool's claims to cultural excellence. A member of the Glyndebourne staff explained that this company could not go to cities which were "allocated" by the public funding bodies to other companies. Is Culture Liverpool doing anything to make it known that Liverpool is very poorly served as regards opera? Can we expect it to stick up for the interest of our region in the face of the usual tendency to spend taxpayers' money in the South East?

Many pubs in and around Liverpool have old photos of the locality on their walls, which makes interesting study. The *Liverpool* in Water Street goes one better. It has a panel on the wall outside giving details of the current HMS Liverpool, a Type 42 destroyer with helicopter and missile facilities. She is the seventh ship to bear this name and was built at Cammell Lairds in 1980. The bell of any earlier HMS Liverpool is on The Tap pub at Eastham. Another ship built at Lairds was HMS *Oracle* a submarine launched in 1963 and decommissioned in 1993. She was the first ship of Commodore Baum, the Navy's new regional commander for Northern England, who is based at East Brunswick Dock, Liverpool.

An interesting angle in the debates about Liverpool's alleged guilt for the slave trade is a report from Lagos in Nigeria that Civil Rights Congress, a coalition of human rights groups, calls for African traditional leaders to apologise for their ancestors role in selling slaves to the European slave traders. We also noticed that a delegation of 30 lawyers from Nigeria were in Liverpool the other day. The organisers noted the rich maritime history of Liverpool which mirrors that of Lagos.

The Friends of St John's Gardens heard a report about the installation of handrails to assist less agile people going up the steps into the Garden. There was discussion about how to care better for and display the Calder Stones. There was reference to the excellent way in which somewhat similar but more extensive relics are displayed at Newgrange in Ireland.

Liverpool City Council is carrying out a survey by questionnaire about the city's parks, some of which count as heritage locations. Contact Chris Lies on 0151 225 4877.

Liverpool's taxis are among the city's best advocates, speaking with pride about the city's buildings and events - and not for a moment joining the fashionable chorus apologising for whatever misdeed our ancestors may or may not have committed. Good for them!

We have had some trouble with our website, someone intercepting it with views about Azerbaijan (with which we have no connection). We have taken corrective action.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- The Anglican Cathedral will have an art and sculpture exhibition called *Icons in Transformation* the work of Russian artist Ludmila Pawlowska. To be opened by Phil Redmond at 7.30 on 31 January. The Cathedral will celebrate the centenary of the completion of the Lady Chapel in June 2010. It is noted for its elaborate design, its organ, the famous fifteenth century statue by Giovanni Della Robbia and its windows featuring Kitty Wilkinson, Agnes Jones and other notable women. The Cathedral is looking for information and mementoes about the chapel. Contact: val.jackson@liverpoolcathedral.org.uk
- The Two Rivers Festival will be held at Birkenhead School in 2010. There will be celebrity recitals on 15 January (violin/piano: Mendelssohn, Prokofiev, Kreisler), 5 February, 2 March and 16 April. Call: 0151 651 3095.
- Liverpool Welsh Choral and the Northop Silver present carols at the Phil on 12 December. Tickets: 0151 652 6374.
- The Mayer Society (0151 334 8035) has a talk about Price's Village (34 years older than Port Sunlight) on 9 December and on Roman Wirral on 17 March. In Bebington Civic Centre.
- Culture Liverpool wishes to commission Liverpool based professional dance companies/artists to contribute to the year-long programme of dance in 2010, Liverpool's Year of Innovation, Health & Well Being. The work will need to take place between 1st April 2010 and the 31st March 2011. Highlights of the 2010 dance programme include: Dance and Film on the Waterfront, 2nd – 4th July 2010 and a presence at World Expo in Shanghai May to October 2010: The theme of July 2010 will be Culture, Health and Sport and this will be celebrated in Liverpool through the dance programme. The deadline for applications is Wednesday 13th January 2010.

Info: Jenny Kane. Email: Jennifer.kane@liverpool.gov.uk, Tel: 0151 233 1151. Liverpool will be the only British city to have the only pavilion at Shanghai.

- A conference about commemorative plaques will take place at RIBA in London 18-19 February, organised by English Heritage.
- Are you aware of the quarterly events guide produced by the City Council? For a copy call 0151 233 2008.

We wish all heritaggers a happy Christmas and good fortune in the new year.

Andrew Pearce. Editor

CHRISTMAS – THE BIGGEST SEASONAL EVENT IN OUR HERITAGE

“Merry Mortgage Deals”, “Festive Offers”, “Christmas: Discover more Value”, cry the posters in Liverpool centre (and everywhere else). What is the origin of this festival of religious belief or consumerism (gluttony?)

Some Christmas activities were created for commercial purposes. Father Christmas is based on St Nicholas, a 4th century bishop in what is now Turkey. He was said to have given bags of gold to release certain women who had been forced into prostitution in payment of a debt owed by their father. His birthday was on 6th Dec, a day of celebration in many countries today. 25th December is said to have been chosen as Christmas Day taking over the supposed birthday of the “Unconquerable Sun God”, Mithras, from pagan religions in the days of the Roman Empire. In the 1930s, the Coca Cola Company created the current image of Father Christmas in red cloak with white trim – the Coca Cola colours. Boxing Day is named after the custom of the English gentry to give their staff gifts in special boxes the day after Christmas Day.

Carols are festive church songs, mostly sung in the Christmas period, originating at least as far back as the 13th century. Sometimes, in the past, they were accompanied by dancing, which was called caroling! Today’s favourite Christmas carols were written by Germans, Americans, Englishmen and others. “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” was written by Charles Wesley with music by Felix Mendelssohn. Wesley would not have been pleased about a Jew writing his music and it would have been the same for Mendelssohn. “The First Noël” (meaning the first news – *nouvelles* in French) typifies the wish to proclaim what Christians take as the good news of Christmas time. “Good King Wenceslas” tells of the Christian deeds of a 10th century Bohemian king. Outside the church, Christmas songs include “Old King Cole”, named after a British leader around 400 AD, “Jingle Bells” and the Bing Crosby favourite “White Christmas”, written by Irving Berlin in 1940 and one of the most played records of all time, having sold 100,00 million copies.

Eating lots of food is part of our Christmas heritage. Puddings were made of flour and suet (the fat round beef kidneys) mixed with meat stew (“pottage”) plus plums or other end-of-season fruit to act as preservatives. Mince tarts were pastry cases filled with minced meat and fruit. As other means of preserving meat became available, its use in puddings and tarts was discontinued but we still enjoy the pastry, the imported fruit such as currants and orange peel and the brandy.

In olden times mistletoe was thought to have magic powers, perhaps because its leaves remained green even when the oak trees on which it parasitically grew had shed their leaves. It was also viewed as an aphrodisiac, hence the custom of kissing under it. The druids thought that holly was a symbol of life during the winter snows. The Romans and then the early Christians later associated it with Christmas. In ancient times, Egyptians, Romans, Jews and medieval English people ate geese on special festivals. This began to change in England in the 1500s when turkeys began to be imported from America.

A 7th century monk used the triangular shape of a fir tree to illustrate the relationship seen by Christians between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The use of Christmas trees began in Germany and was popularised in England by Prince Albert, Queen Victoria’s husband. The decorations and lights were to represent the fairies who were thought to live in the woods where the trees came from, hence the term “fairy lights”. The first commercial Christmas cards were made in 1843 by Henry Cole of Bond Street in London following the use of privately made cards in Britain and America for several years.

So what was the origin of all this, the western world’s biggest festival? One could adapt the slogan of one retail chain: “Christmas wouldn’t be Christmas without M&S”. It certainly wouldn’t be Christmas without the memory of the birth of Jesus Christ, even if M&S were still there. The years (such as 2009) are labelled from his birth in Bethlehem, in what is now the West Bank of Palestine - although he is thought to have actually been born about four years before the year One. Shepherds who had been minding their sheep on the arid hills nearby came to see the baby shortly after he was born. Two or three years later, three political leaders (the “wise men”) following a strange light in the sky, came to see the child in Nazareth, now in Israel, bringing expensive gifts.

What was so special about the baby? The word “Christ” which was given to Jesus, is not a surname but a title for a very special religious person, a “Messiah”. In the Jewish faith, Jesus was a prophet but not the Messiah, for whom they had waited long before Jesus was born and for whom they still wait. To Muslims Jesus was a prophet, a messenger sent by God, born more than five hundred years before Mohammed, the founder of their own faith. Christians believe that Jesus was the son of God and is the basis of their faith.

In Liverpool the (Anglican) Cathedral Church of Christ and the (Roman Catholic) Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King and every other church in Liverpool will be decked at Christmas with representations of the Jesus’ birthplace, the shepherds, the wise men, holly, ivy etc all part of our heritage.