The Woolton Road Melly Drinking Fountain, Liverpool

By Patrick Neill

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Front cover picture taken by Jonathan P. Neill
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Foreword

New Drinking Fountains have not been installed on the streets of Liverpool for many a year. But there are still many examples of Melly’s fountains to be found all over Liverpool. The Vauxhall area of the city is rich in history and heritage and is lucky to have, not one but two Melly’s; one on Byrom Street, the other on Great Howard Street. Along with these simple granite fountain, the Vauxhall area can also boast:

- three cast iron niche fountains on the Dock Road, installed in May 1854
- two cast iron fountains at Waterloo Dock, dated 1889
- two yellow granite fountains at Prince’s Dock, installation dates not known
- two cast iron lamppost fountains at Eldon Grove, installed around 1911
- the Hannah Mary Thom fountain, now at Mazenod Court, installed in 1890
- the Dandy ‘Pat’ Byrne fountain, now at St Anthony’s church, Scotland Road, installed in 1892

Clean fresh drinking water is taken for granted nowadays, whether it’s from; a design labelled bottle, sparkling or still, Scottish, Welsh, English or French, or bog standard tap water, the purity can not be denied. If we take ourselves back to the 1800’s in Liverpool, the same can not be said. Many a drinking well was contaminated with decease which may have killed hundreds of people. After 1847 when Liverpool Council bought out the private water companies, the water supply to the poor work class was improved if they paid a ‘water rate’.

It took a man of vision, tenacity, wealth and power to provide free clean drinking water to working men. He made this available on the streets of the town via his simple red granite fountains. The people of Liverpool and the rest of the UK owe Melly an enormous debt of gratitude and thanks. If his red granite drinking fountains were made Grade II Listed, that would go some way to showing our appreciation. I would like to publicly thank Melly on behalf of all the Liverpool people, who were able to quench their thirst, free of charge, from his fountains.

Ron Formby
Former Secretary of ‘The Friends of Liverpool Monuments’
Dudlow Lane Station and Woolton Reservoir

By Peter Cahill

‘An old, rather poor photograph of the original works and in which the Melly fountain can just be seen’.

In 1864 a reservoir was built at the junction of Dudlow Lane and Woolton Road to receive Rivington water. This reservoir had a capacity of just over a million gallons and a top water level of 210 ft above sea level. A steam engine, the "John Farnworth" lifted this water to Woolton reservoir in Reservoir Road at an elevation of 298 feet above sea level. Woolton reservoir is of a similar capacity and was built also in 1864.

In 1870 wells were constructed and sunk to a depth of 247 feet below ground. Headings were driven from these wells and an 18" diameter borehole driven some 196 feet below the bottom of the wells. In 1888 a further borehole, 6 inches in diameter, was sunk to a depth of 300 feet below the well bottom. The steam pump used to raise water from the wells was the "Thomas Duncan".

The yield of these works was about 1,200,000 gallons a day and this water was generally pumped to Woolton rather than Rivington Water which was then used for the low level areas.
When the new well was sunk, several private wells in the area became dry. Some of owners then converted the empty wells into cesspits to receive sewage from their homes. In time the contents of these cesspits caused contamination of the aquifer and thus Dudlow Lane well. Pumping from the well ceased and the Corporation took measures to compel the Local Board of Wavertree to install a drainage system and connect the offending properties to the sewers.

Dudlow Lane was eventually used again but in view of the potential for contamination was most carefully monitored.

The use of Dudlow Lane as a source of water supply ceased many years ago. Most of the original buildings have been demolished. A cottage, which originally housed a pump attendant, is now privately owned. There were other pump attendants' dwellings on the west side of the site but were demolished long ago when the adjacent flats were built. The reservoir itself was decommissioned a few years ago and has recently been demolished. New retirement apartments are currently being built on the site (August 2006)

The reservoir at Woolton is supplied with water still pumped from Dudlow Lane but now using electrical pumps to do so. These pumps receive water direct from the mains that formerly fed the reservoir.
Survey and Condition Report on 11\textsuperscript{th} January 2006

Conducted by Robin Riley

Description: Melly Drinking Fountain (named after Charles Pierre Melly), known as ‘the father of drinking fountains’, he erected the first \textbf{free} drinking fountain in England at Prince’s Dock Liverpool in 1853.

Erected: 1856 (engraved on the pediment of the fountain).

Location: Opposite; Hattons Lane in the wall of the Dudlow Lane reservoir, Woolton, Road, Liverpool L16, close to the Half Way House Public House.

Material: Polished red Aberdeen granite set in a red sandstone supporting wall.

Sculptor: A. MacDonald of Aberdeen (inscribed on the Basin), his name appears on more than half the red granite fountains still surviving in Liverpool. For more information, see:

www.glasgowsculpture.com/pg\_biography.php?sub=macdonald\_a-co
**Condition:** No problems of cracking or movement. There are several chips around the whole of the fountain. Pollution grime, paint and organic growth cover the fountain and the red sandstone supporting wall. There is loss of mortar between the Basin, Slab and Pediment. The face plate and tap are missing, the bronze Lion head water spout has been removed for replication. Part of the cast iron waste water pipe is still connected to the Basin.

**Pediment size in inches:** Width = 26, height = 6, sides = 4

**Slab size in inches:** Width = 24, height = 18

**Basin size in inches:** Width = 26, height = 10, lip = 2 3/8

**Additional measurements:** The Basin projects 16 inches from the wall. The centre of the waterspout hole is 5 ½ inches from the base of the Slab.

**Additional information:** Strangely this fountain does not appear on the list of Liverpool Drinking Fountains produced by Charles P. Melly in 1858.

**Recommendations:**

1. Gentle cleaning of whole of the drinking fountain.
2. Lime mortar re-pointing of the fountain and supporting wall.
Risk Assessment

Before any attempt was made to clean the fountain, a risk assessment was carried out on the location.

We asked ourselves the following questions

- Is the area around the fountain a safe place to work? Answer: Yes
- Is there any danger from road traffic? Answer: NO
- Would any members of the public be put in danger by our work? Answer: NO
- Is the fountain and supporting wall in a sound safe condition? Answer: Yes
- Is there any danger from the tree branches that overhanging the wall? Answer: NO
- Is the pavement around the fountain level, in good condition and safe to work on? Answer: YES
• Are there any sharp objects in and around the fountain? Answer: Yes, there are sharp pieces of metal, care should be taken when cleaning the following and gloves warn if required:

1. The brass waterspout protruding from the Slab.
2. The brackets on the cast iron waste water pipe.
3. There is soil in the basin which may contain glass or sharp objects.

• Is there any danger of dust? Answer: YES, dust mask and eye protection required when removing dust.
Health And Safety Equipment

- Leather gloves
- Eye protectors
- Dust masks

Cleaning Equipment

- Containers of water
- Sponges
- Cotton cloths
- Assorted bushes
- Plastic shovel
- Small plastic water container (used ice cream tub)
- Large plastic sheet
- Large cardboard sheet
- Strong plastic bags
- Trowels, various sizes
Charles P. Melly, the son of André Melly of Geneva and Ellen Greg of Quarry Bank, Wilmslow, was born in Tuebrook Liverpool on 25th May 1829. He married Louise Forget in Geneva, Switzerland on 9th October 1854. They had eight children:

- Charles Henry Melly, born 10th April 1856 in Geneva, Switzerland
- Edward Ferdinand Melly, born 7th July 1857, Liverpool, England
- Ernest Louise Melly, born 27th June 1859, Liverpool, England
- Fanny Bertha Melly, born 12th October 1860, Liverpool, England
Melly got the idea for Drinking Fountains during a visit to Geneva in 1852. Whilst there he later wrote “Observing the beautiful stone water Fountains which are so abundant in that city and elsewhere on the Continent”. At that time in Geneva, the water was the property of the town authorities and was distributed by them to the citizens through the means of large public fountains. Free of cost, every household would take water from the public fountain and put it in their private cistern, or pay someone to do it for them.

In Liverpool at that time with the exception of two troughs at the docks, water was supplied into people’s homes by pipes, only if they paid a ‘water rate’. Melly who spent a lot of time at the docks, noticed the working man could not quench his thirst without going into a public house “where they were expected to pay for a stronger and less refreshing drink than they required”. He was advised by policemen and working men, that there was a great need for drinking water by the working man and the emigrants from Ireland and the Continent on their way to America, Australia and elsewhere. Many of these people were accustomed to public fountains in every town and village of their own country. Some were in such distress, they were glad enough to drink at the horse trough.

At that time the supply of water was limited, and it was not without difficulty that two small drinking taps were put up at Prince’s Dock, in 1853; the numbers who made use of were such, that the ball tap affixed to one of them, and the spring tap by which other was worked, were both worn out in the course of a few months, and it was necessary to devise some more durable way of giving water in the street. So it was decided the fountain should be supplied by a continuous flow of water day & night. This may seem to be a useless expense. But experience had shown this is the best way to provide water at the time, as even the best tap mechanisms were liable to fail due to the use put upon them.
In March 1854, the first granite Fountain was erected at the south end of Prince’s Dock. And three months later the numbers drinking there in the course of a twelve hours period, were carefully counted, and found to be 2336.

The most common Melly Fountain is made of polished red granite, consisting of three pieces;

1. A basin projecting from the wall by sixteen inches (The basin is fixed with it lip about three foot eight inches from the ground)

2. A slab about two foot square, fixed in the wall above it, and resting on it with a bronze head, through which the water flows into the basin

3. A simple pediment as a finish on the top, which is usual dated

For the users to drink the water from the fountains, two drinking cups were provided, one either side of the basin. These cups had long handles which made them look like soup ladles, and were secured by a small length of chain to the wall, either side of the fountain.

Charles Melly spent £500 of his own money providing Drinking Fountains, so it says in Andrew F. Richards book "Well I Never Noticed That!" part one.

Most of this information has come from ‘A Paper on Drinking Fountains’ by Charles P. Melly, held at the Liverpool Record Office (ref. H 711.68 MEL). Pages 5-8 and the annexed illustration of a Granite Fountain and Cattle Trough are missing. With the paper is a list of 43 Liverpool Drinking Fountains but it is not possible to read numbers 19, 20 & 21 due to the way the paper has been rebound.

The nine surviving wall fountains are of great socio-historic importance, they were an everyday necessity for people at a time when pure water was almost unavailable, a condition almost forgotten now. They are a unique group for the national heritage, predating London, they are an extraordinary piece of street furniture, adding destination to the sites they occupy. Further more
they will become a teaching tool for the future. We propose they should be Listed to ensure proper conservation and maintenance.

Charles P. Melly died on Saturday 10th November 1888, aged 59 years. A quote of George Melly, the writer, wit and Jazz player (a relative to Charles P. Melly); "He was a melancholy philanthropist who commit suicide". I think Charles Melly was a lot more than that, he was a man of vision and ideas, who saw a problem and came up with a solution. Liverpool working men and the citizens of the city owe a lot to this man. I hope that a fitting way to honour this great man can be found.

In the Memoirs to Charles Melly which was completed and edited by his son Edward there is a copy of an article from a local newspaper:

The Late Mr. C. P. Melly

Much regret will be felt in Liverpool at the death of Mr. C. P. Melly, which was announced in our obituary column this morning as having occurred on Saturday at his residence, Riversley, Aigburth. We understand from what we can gather that Mr Melly had been under medical treatment for some years, has been in the habit of visiting at Scarborough and at his sons' houses, and also his own home at Aigburth. Last week he was paying one of those visits to Riversley where he continued to show great signs of great nervous depression under which he had been suffering for so many years.

Mr Melly was well known and highly respected in Liverpool, and in his day and generation did great service to his fellow townsmen. The deceased, who is the eldest brother of Mr. George Melly, J.P., was born in 1829, and would have been sixty years of age next May. He was elected a member of the City Council for Abercromby Ward in 1866 without a contest. In 1869 he was opposed by Mr. Robert Vining, when he was re-elected by a majority of 68 votes. At the end of his next term he did not seek re-election. He took a great interest in the establishment of free drinking water fountains in different parts of the city. He also interested himself deeply in the question of providing public seats in various quarters of the town, and was in way the leader of a movement which has become very popular in other towns, and has been of great advantage to exhausted pedestrians and others. Mr. Melly, it may be said, had more to do with the inauguration of Sefton Park than anybody else. It was owing to his exertions that
the park was bought. At the time Mr. Melly was the chairman of the Parks Committee, and it was he who was entrusted with the arrangements which were subsequently made with the artists who came over from France to make the landscape garden. The whole idea was originally his, and was worked out by him to a successful issue. In addition to his public duties as a City Councillor, Mr Melly took a keen interest in other philanthropic work. He was the founder of the North East Mission, and was actively engaged for a long time in the arrangements of various local charities, which have since been got into such complete working form. The foundation of the first night school, which was established in Beaufort Street, Liverpool, in 1852, was due to his exertions. To Mr Melly, was due the credit of having been the means of getting the Liverpool Gymnasium, in Myrtle Street, erected. He was further instrumental in introducing the present system of lighting gas lamps in the street, having brought the idea of a long pole from Geneva, which superseded the step ladder apparatus formally in vogue. Mr. Melly leaves a family of seven sons and one daughter. He was a member of the well known firm of Melly, Forget and Company, Cotton Merchants.
DRINKING-FOUNTAINS.

From The Illustrated London News (April, 9, 1859)

In a former Number we stated that an association was being formed for the purpose of erecting and promoting the erection of drinking-fountains in the metropolis.

On Tuesday next, at three o'clock, a public meeting will be held in Willis's Rooms for the purpose of formally inaugurating the association, and bringing the merits of the movement prominently before the public. Lord Carlisle has consented to preside, supported by Lord Shaftesbury, Mr. Gurney, M.P. for Falmouth (who originated the movement in London), and other distinguished philanthropists. "We have little doubt that the object will receive the amount of public support of which it is so deserving.

The accompanying Engraving represents a mural fountain to be shortly erected by the association in the parish of St. Mary, Islington. The cup, which is of porcelain enameled iron-ware, stands in an alcove of white marble. The latter is surrounded with elegantly-designed framework of bronze. The contrast of the bronze with the white marble will have a pleasing effect; whilst the cool and pure appearance of the latter is exactly adapted to the
purposes of a drinking-fountain. It is designed and will be executed by Messrs. Willa and Co., Euston-road.

Impressed with the desirability of these fountains supplying the public with absolutely pure water, the association have resolved not to erect, nor sanction the erection of, any fountain without a filter: particular pains have been taken to ascertain the most efficient and durable kind. For this purpose several have been referred, for the analysis of their purifying powers, to Drs. Letheby and Lankester.

One Of The Liverpool Fountains Erected By Mr C.P. Melly

We cannot conclude without adverting to the liberality with which the vestry of St. Mary's, Islington, have treated the subject, agreeing to take on themselves the payment of the water-rate of four fountains, and also a proportion of the expense of each, on the condition of the association completing the fountains. It is hoped that other local bodies will act in a similar spirit of enlightened liberality. The necessity for these fountains in the metropolis and elsewhere seems now to be generally felt, and an earnest desire has been shown to supply this want of great towns. A drinking-fountain in the wall of St. Sepulchre's churchyard, of which we intend giving an Engraving in an early Number, has
recently been completed; and two fountains were opened on Tuesday week, as recorded in our last Number, at the approach to the South-Eastern Railway Company's terminus at London-bridge. Other towns have, however, been beforehand with the metropolis in this laudable work. In Liverpool a large number of public drinking-fountains has been erected at the expense of a merchant of that town. We give an Engraving of one of these; also of one in the city of Chester, presented to the public by Mr. Peter Eaton.
PRESENTATION TO MR. MELLY.

From The Illustrated London News (Nov, 30, 1861)

TESTIMONIAL RECENTLY PRESENTED TO MR. CHARLES MELLY, OF LIVERPOOL

EARLY in this month Mr. Charles P. Melly, of Liverpool, was presented, in the Council Chamber of the Liverpool Townhall, with a handsome tribute in recognition of his origination of public drinking-fountains and his liberal gift of free playgrounds and wayside benches, for the use of the people. The testimonial, which was designed and manufactured by Messrs. Elkington and Co., of Liverpool, consists of a massive silver epergne and candelabrum, the design representing a vine, beautifully interpolated with the tendrils and offshoots of that tree. At the base are three delicately-chased figures, emblematical of the fine arts — Music, Sculpture, and Painting. On one side of the pedestal are the armorial bearing of Mr. Melly; on another representation of one of the drinking-fountains at Geneva (from seeing which Mr. Melly is said to have taken the idea of the establishment of public drinking-fountains); and on the third the following inscription: — "To Charles Pierre Melly, the originator of Public Drinking-fountains, a true practical reformer; who, instead of merely denouncing drunkenness, has
removed one of its causes by placing within reach of the thirsty wayfarer a draught of pure water, and who, by the gift of Free Playgrounds and Wayside Benches, has provided recreation for the active and rest for the weary, this testimonial is presented by his fellow-townsmen. Liverpool, Nov. 6, 1861." The Mayor (S. R. Graves, Esq.) presided; and amongst the gentlemen present were—the Rev. Rector Campbell, Rev. S. A. Steinthal, Alderman Bennett, J. G. Livingston, T. D. Anderson, 'Walter F. M'Gregor, C. B. Bowring, W. Earle, Jos. Hubback, T. B. Job, J. W. Cropper, Alfred Jevons, and others of local note.