

THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY

*The national society for
the study and
protection of Victorian
and Edwardian
architecture and allied
arts*

LIVERPOOL GROUP NEWSLETTER July 2011



LIVER CENTENARY

"For the architect this is a mass of incongruities, but to the man in the street it is a romantic pile. A mass of grey granite to the cornice, it rose into the sky two quite unnecessary towers, which can symbolise nothing but the power of advertisement. Yet the building, with its coarse and commonplace detail, has a certain grim force combined with its romantic character. In place of elegance and refinement, it offers to the world a bold sentimentality. If I may venture on a comparison, the Liver Building is as obviously plebeian as the Cunard is patrician, whereas the Dock Board one might perhaps, without offence, call nouveau riche." --- *Charles Reilly, 'Some Liverpool Streets and Buildings in 1921', 1921.*



"W. Aubrey Thomas is a much neglected architect of considerable ability. The Royal Liver Friendly Society building is his chef-d'oeuvre. This massive twentieth-century structure has no counterpart in England and is one of the world's earliest essays in multi-storey reinforced concrete construction - not that one could tell from the exterior. Its side elevations remind one of H. H. Richardson's work in Chicago. Its bulk towers above the waterfront, and is the most characteristic image of Liverpool. The modelling of the towers is derived from art nouveau, yet the handling of the pieces is quite individual. The foundation stone was laid in 1908 and the building finished in 1911." --- *Quentin Hughes, 'Seaport', 1964.*

"In spite of the bombing and carelessness, Liverpool is still full of superb buildings, its magnificent nineteenth-century classical sequence worked out in a grand, wise and creative old age instead of being cut short by

the Gothic Revival. On the quayside, the Liver Building shows how effortlessly the tradition slipped into a monumental Art Nouveau that could easily have turned into a rational modern architecture instead of the cubist irrationality that was forced on us in the nineteen-twenties and thirties through our own stupidity." --- *Ian Nairn, 'Britain's Changing Towns', 1964.*

"Facing the Mersey on the land gained by covering the George's Dock are three extremely ambitious buildings. They represent the great Edwardian Imperial optimism and might indeed stand at Durban or Hong Kong just as naturally as at Liverpool. The grandest is the Royal Liver Building. It is of reinforced concrete and showy in the extreme but, it can't be denied, also impressive. It is eight storeys high with two more in the roof and has to W and E an identical middle tower ending in a free, entirely un-period top or domed cap with the legendary Liver Bird, perhaps in its motifs faintly Byzantine." --- *Nikolaus Pevsner, 'The Buildings of England: South Lancashire', 1969.*

"The Royal Liver Building is perhaps the most extraordinary office block of its date in the country. It is almost certainly also the tallest, and was referred to as a skyscraper in the contemporary press. It displeased the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, which had hoped for a building that would balance its own, not an attention-grabbing monster like this... Two extravagant clock towers reach 295 ft (90 metres) above the pavement. The frame of the building was designed by the engineers L. G. Mouchel & Partners using the system of ferro-concrete construction devised by the French builder François Hennebique. The exterior granite is simply a cladding no more than 14 in. (35 cm.) thick. The style is impossible to label. The round-arched windows and the short columns below the main cornice recall Louis Sullivan's Auditorium Building of 1886-9 in Chicago. The two giant Liver birds, adding a surreal touch to the clock towers, are of sheet copper (originally gilded) on steel armatures. They were made by the Bromsgrove Guild." --- *Joseph Sharples, 'Liverpool: Pevsner Architectural Guide', 2004.*



EVENTS

Friday 19 August 2011 - **HIGH NOON AT THE LIVER**

In celebration of the Liver Building centenary we will gather at the Pier Head front of the building **not later than 11.50 am.** Our guided tour will last an hour: please note that those wishing to reach the birds will be faced by steep steps (participation in this as in all the Society's events is at your own risk, neither the Society nor its officers accepting any liability of any kind). After this visit, the group will cross to the Crowne Plaza Hotel where sandwiches plus tea/coffee will be provided. There will then be a 15 minute walk to Millennium House (60

Victoria Street) where John Hinchliffe, World Heritage Officer, will reflect on how Liverpool's World Heritage Site status was achieved, indicating the requirements of 'proper management and conservation'. It is anticipated that his talk will finish c. 3.30pm. The event has been planned by Carol Hardie and is strictly limited to 25 people.

Saturday 3 September 2011 - **OLDHAM AND ABOUT**

Tony Murphy will 'extend' last September's very successful excursion with a new look at Tameside, for the surprises of Haughton Green (Medland & Taylor) in the south to Pennine-set Uppermill, the valley, and revitalised Oldham: the splendid gallery, the embattled Town Hall and a view of the one-time 'Cotton Capital of the World'. (Where would Liverpool have been without it?!)

(Depart Dale St/North John St corner at 9.30 prompt. Cost [bring packed lunch]: £18 (includes church donations). Return by 7pm)

Saturday 29 October 2011 - **BLACKWELL, BAILLIE SCOTT & VOYSEY**

Tony Murphy will lead this excursion to Blackwell where the special exhibition on Baillie Scott and Voysey ('The Lake District & Beyond: Arts & Crafts Houses and Furnishings') can be viewed. The great house itself and its impressive close neighbours will be seen; also, a look at some fine work at Staveley (Burne-Jones in the North) and time in and around Bowness. [Members will recall that Matthew Hyde reflected on his recently published Pevsner-revision of "Cumbria" at our meeting last November.]

(Depart Dale St/North John St corner at 9.30 prompt. Cost [bring packed lunch or use café facilities at Blackwell/Bowness] £20 (includes £6.50 entry to Blackwell). Return by 7pm)

LECTURES

Please spread the word for this special series which will give the Liverpool Group the opportunity of hearing talks originally delivered in the prestigious lecture sequences organised in London by the national Society.

Our lectures take place at 2 for 2.15pm at the Quaker Meeting House, 22 School Lane, Liverpool L1 3BT. They are open to all - £3 admission.

Saturday 22 October 2011

THE ARCHITECTURE OF SIR ERNEST GEORGE

We welcome Professor Hilary Grainger, Chair of the Victorian Society, to Merseyside for an illustrated talk arising from her recently published, highly acclaimed book on one of our very greatest late Victorian domestic architects. Ernest George (1839-1922) is celebrated both for country houses and astonishing London streetscapes like Harrington Gardens and Pont Street. George was also a significant contributor to Port Sunlight. Lutyens, Herbert Baker and Guy Dawber all worked in his office.

Saturday 5 November 2011

AN ARCHITECT ABROAD : MR STREET *EN VACANCES*

Professor Neil Jackson, Chair in Architecture at Liverpool University, has published widely on both 19th and 20th-century architecture, including a recent book on Saltaire (members will recall his report to us on his research for this). George Edmund Street made several journeys to Europe with consequent publications and much influence on his own robust and assured work in the Gothic Revival.

Saturday 26 November 2011

GEORGE GILBERT SCOTT AND HIS CHURCHES

The national Society's autumn lecture series will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of the most famous and successful of all Victorian architects. A key speaker, former national Chair, Geoff Brandwood, will join us to survey the range and quality of an astonishing body of ecclesiastical work, from delightful country churches to imposing buildings in urban settings. He will argue that Scott's prolific activity has had the ironic effect of obscuring knowledge and appreciation of his output.

CHESTER CIVIC TRUST AT THE GROSVENOR MUSEUM, CHESTER

All lectures open to non-members, suggested donation £3 (no booking). Lectures begin at 7.30pm.

Thursday 25 August: Graham Fisher, JOHN DOUGLAS CENTENARY TALK (in conjunction with Heritage Open Days)

Wednesday 23 November: David Heathcote, A SHELL EYE ON ENGLAND (the Shell County Guides 1934-1984)

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY IN 2012

Saturday 21 January: Annual Business Meeting at Bishop Lloyd's Palace, Watergate Street, Chester, followed by a Peter Boughton lecture.

Saturday 18 February: Geoff Brandwood on Austin & Paley) Quaker Meeting House,

Saturday 3 March: Neil Jackson on Japanese architecture) School Lane,

Saturday 17 March: David Casement on the Laxey Wheel) Liverpool.

FEATURE

Carol Hardie digs into the archives to celebrate an exhibition of 125 years ago -

'THE SHIPPERIES' - known officially as 'The International Exhibition of Navigation, Travel, Commerce and Manufacture, Liverpool, 1886'

Liverpool is not usually shy in trumpeting its successes but its hosting of the first International Exhibition in Britain outside London seems to have been wiped from our collective memory. Anyone wondering why a now derelict pub in Durning Road, several miles from the sea, is called 'The Shipperies' (photo below) is seeing the only visible reminder of this amazing feat of Victorian endeavour. After a mere nine months preparation, the exhibition opened almost exactly 125 years ago on May 11th, 1886.

Following the success of Prince Albert's Great Exhibition in 1851, there had been many cities worldwide keen to follow suit. From Paris to Toronto, Delhi to Chicago, successful exhibitions celebrated their country's achievements and promoted trade.



Organization fell to the mayor, 51 year old David Radcliffe, chairman of the council of the exhibition. He was the son of a Huddersfield clothier whose family had moved to Liverpool where he made good rising from apprentice engineer and iron founder to owner of the business and was able to retire at 48. The committees contained some familiar names e.g. Thomas Shelmerdine junior and Thomas H. Ismay. With only nine months to prepare, finance was raised by a guarantor system. There was a guarantee fund of £90,000 with contributions from many well-known names with amounts ranging from £2000, from the Earl of Derby, down to £5. Contributors included: Thomas H. Ismay, Lewis's department store, G.H. Lee, Owen Owen, the American Chamber of Commerce and R Makin (£30 5s). Any excess funds were earmarked to set up a 'Prince Leopold technical, artistic and industrial school'.



David Lewis, one of the guarantors, the owner of Lewis's Department store, saw a marketing opportunity and chartered Brunel's ship the Great Eastern (then laid up in Milford Haven harbour) and on May 2nd moored it off New Ferry (where until

recently there was a pub called the Great Eastern, containing memorabilia.) A quarter of a million people lined the banks of the Mersey to watch it arrive. The ship's sides bore a sign in huge letters: 'BUY AT LEWIS'S STORES'. Lewis converted it into a floating entertainment palace and ferried customers out at 1/- a time. During its six months in the Mersey - concurrent with the Exhibition - half a million visitors enjoyed its on-board amusements. Lewis's also issued a souvenir booklet and charged 1d for customers to have pictures of Lewis's great establishments printed on their own handkerchiefs. Sadly David Lewis died four months before he could see his plan come to such profitable fruition.

In due course, a site was selected: 35 acres, east of Wavertree Park and the Botanic Gardens in Edge Hill, south of Edge Lane, and the land purchased from the Edge Lane Hall estate. The hall was disused but it was decided not to demolish it but to incorporate it into the exhibition, as the Navigation Inn. Mayor Radcliffe lived on-site there for the duration of the preparations, working day and night. Mr. Henry Sumners, a partner in Culshaw and Sumners, was appointed architect. He designed St. Cyprian's Church on the corner of Durning Road and what is now the National Conservation Centre, in Whitechapel .

The land at Edge Lane was found to be very marshy and so before work began two million bricks were cemented as footings for the exhibition buildings. It was also rough and uncultivated, and some had to be lowered by twenty percent.

The centrepiece was an iron and glass pavilion with a 100' high dome, purchased from Antwerp where it had served as their International Exhibition Hall. Transported by sea, some of the building was lost overboard in a gale. The erection was also hindered by an exceptionally bad winter.

Access to the site was duly improved, too. A new road, Exhibition Road, was built between Wavertree Road and Edge Lane, roughly along the side of the now empty Littlewoods building, and for the convenience of visitors and exhibitors, London and North West Railway built a new branch line from Edge Hill with a temporary station (also called Exhibition Road) adjoining the grounds. European countries used rail to transport their exhibits, and day railway excursions were advertised from all over England. Typical fares were 3/3d from Leeds, 4/6d return from York. Some had cheaper workmen's fares.

The exhibition was opened by Queen Victoria. Leaving St. George's Hall in an open carriage despite pouring rain, she was met at the exhibition site by the band of the Grenadier Guards playing 'Rule Britannia'. The Mayor presented her with a gold key which, when turned in a model lock, caused all twelve doors to the main building to fly open simultaneously.

Victoria was accompanied by her son, the Duke of Connaught, and her daughter, Princess Beatrice, whose husband, Prince Henry of Battenburg, knighted Mayor Radcliffe during the ceremony. (The Liverpool Mercury could not resist commenting that the Queen was also accompanied by the brother of John Brown...) Victoria noted that the soldiers forming the guard of honour, who had stood for several hours in the relentless rain, had no overcoats. She decreed that overcoats be added to their uniform.

The Queen stayed at Newsham House for three days and whilst there she listened to a concert from a theatre in the city via the telephone. (Since the 1880s, the telephone companies had broadcast news, concerts and weather reports). She visited the nearby Seamen's Orphanage, a home for children who had lost their fathers at sea. This Grade II Alfred Waterhouse building is currently one of the Victorian Society's ten most endangered buildings. It remained an orphanage until 1949, later becoming a hospital. It closed in 1988 and has since lain derelict.

Attendance at the opening ceremony was by application. If more applications than tickets were received, preference would be given to guarantors, then season ticket holders. Rules for the different admission ticket prices were so complicated that a half page of explanation was needed but basically Season Tickets with admission to the opening cost 1 guinea; Ordinary Tickets 1s; and tickets for one day each week 2/6d.

Liverpool's Exhibition was to have been themed 'Vehicular Appliances and Modes of Travelling' but the city's status then, as a leading port of the British Empire, saw the exhibits dominated by the theme of Navigation. 'The Shipperies' was the exhibition's nickname, born of its preponderance of maritime exhibits.

The array of these exhibits was staggering...

Ship owners and merchants of Liverpool built a 50' high trophy (stand or pavilion) containing specimens of typical imports. There was a flight of steps all around and 12ft columns on each corner, square at the base and octagonal higher up. It had a 12' canvas dome painted to show where in the world the imports came from. It was adorned with papier maché dolphins and 'Liver', the Liver bird, with outstretched wings on top.

There was a large diving tank with exhibits of submarine telegraphy, torpedo boats, marine tricycles, life saving equipment and numerous maritime inventions. Also on show were historic exhibits such as Grace Darling's rowing boat and a Viking ship.

The Manx exhibit had model harbours, lighthouses, the Laxey wheel and a steam packet and Manx lugger. Birkenhead shipbuilders Lairds displayed ship models and paintings. Armstrong the armaments manufacturer displayed gunboats and guns.

Models for development of the landing stage were on show, even though the plan had been abandoned on the opening by the Prince of Wales on 20th January 1886, of the rail tunnel to Hamilton Square, first underwater rail tunnel in the world.

One of the most amazing exhibits was the life-size replica of the Eddystone lighthouse, 170' high. At night its beam could be seen 40 miles away. They made the rather exaggerated claim that it was twice the height of any other Liverpool building. However, four churches standing then (the Welsh Presbyterian, St. Nicholas, St. Mary's West Derby, and St. Francis Xavier) and the Municipal Buildings in Dale Street were all over half its height but it was an impressive sight nonetheless.

There were exhibitors from Continental nations, Colonial dominions, and the Great Empire of Her Majesty in India, one clear aim of the event being to celebrate and bring together the countries of the Empire. There were 1,467 British exhibits, and medals were awarded liberally: 500 gold, 1,000 silver, 1500 bronze and 2,000 honourable mention. The architect and designer Arthur Mackmurdo erected a stand for the products of the Century Guild, of which he was a founder. His 'fence' for the stand is an early instance of Japanese influence. The Doulton pottery factory had a trophy – an octagonal structure with 4 porches in enamelled tiles showing Liverpool Then and Now, Commerce and Science. Queen Victoria watched a vase being thrown and decorated by Arthur Pearce. It was later presented to the Queen. She was so impressed that, on knighting Henry Doulton in 1887, she commented on her pleasure at having seen the process of manufacture at the Liverpool Exhibition.

It was commented at the time that it was curious that aeronautical science had hardly progressed with these others, but air travel was represented, after a fashion: a cigar shaped 'captive balloon' ascended to 250' every hour on the hour, driven by a 'Dr. Woelfort, aeronaut'. There was a flying machine too, and though no description is included in the programme, a drawing shows a man in a vehicle with curved wings and a long bird's tail. Exhibits were loaned by aristocracy and military personnel. The Queen lent carriages and harnesses and two Russian sledges, the Duke of Connaught a model of an ambulance wagon, Lord Dormer large leather German postilion boots and spurs, and Sir T G Fermor-Hesketh the remains of a probably Saxon canoe from Martin Mere.

Captain Doughty Burgess, Royal United Services Institution, sent a selection of articles brought home from expeditions searching for Sir John Franklin, a Royal Navy officer and experienced explorer, and his 128 companions. All were lost making an attempt, in 1845, to cross the last unnavigated section of the Northwest Passage. The Admiralty launched a search in 1848 followed by many others encouraged by the offer of a reward. Francis Leopold McClintock in 1859 discovered a note left on King William Island with details about the expedition's fate. They had died of starvation.

Apart from the exhibits there was a full programme of daily events from 10am till late in the evening, lit by electric light. The sight was filled with superb floral displays. James Pain of London provided 'Ascension of grotesque gas balloons with powerful prismatic lights and other pleasing novelties', a 'Forest of fire', 'Grand illuminations by thousands of coloured lamps'. There was a 'Special display of comic fire works by juveniles (weather permitting)'. Entertainment was provided in the Concert Hall and in the open air by bands such as the Grenadier Guards, Coldstream Guards, Blue Hungarian band, Viennese ladies band, classical concerts by leading orchestras and the grand organ.

Two star attractions were the West African Ashanti Palace, a copy of King Koffee's Palace at Coomassie, with native craftsmen producing filigree gold work and offering trips in covered hammocks, and the Indian Village. The highlight of this was the daily procession of animals, imported by Mr. William Cross's zoological establishment at 18 Earle Street, including elephants, zebras, ostriches, camels, llamas and Brahmin bulls. Musicians also joined the procession. (Mr. Cross is said to have imported 80,000 parrots a year). The village contained Indian craftsmen at work, South American huts, paper figures in a canoe, a Singhalese hut with weapons on the walls, plumage headdresses, giant palm trees, devil dancers, and a snake charmer called Natchoomiya.

Japanese rickshaws transported visitors round the 35 acre site. An explanation was needed as to what exactly a rickshaw was: "It is a sort of perambulator for grown up persons". If that sounded too gentle, the Canadian toboggan ride was hair-raisingly fast.

The Lapps brought dogs, deer and sleds and wore their winter clothes made of reindeer skins. Contemporary sources make a tantalizing reference to their 'moonlight flit' but give no explanation.... although there's a hint that

there was some tension with the gypsies from the Royal Epping Forest Gypsy encampment. George Smith and his family were gypsy royalty and it was his idea to open his home to the public and charge admission throughout the country. He brought this roadshow to the exhibition and sold a pamphlet of his biography there, too. The Liverpool Courier and Liverpool Review commented on the extreme cleanliness of his tent, which was fitted out in oriental luxury and was the rage of the exhibition. The Lapps might not have liked playing second fiddle...

If the cultural overload left visitors hungry, there were first and second class dining rooms, and Kirkland's (whose premises can still be seen in Hardman Street, now the 'Fly in the Loaf' pub) had a café and a model bakery. There was a School of Cookery and butter and cheese-making demonstrations by the Aylesbury Dairy Company model dairy. Machinery in motion and processes of manufacture and industry were on show all day as was 'Ye Olde Towere of Leverpole' complete with camera obscura to view the proceedings below.

The exhibition closed on 8th November. The pavilion was dismantled in 1900 and Edge Lane Hall demolished in 1912. The derelict site was used by the City council as a tram depot, then bus depot. This was demolished in the 1990s and it is now an empty field awaiting development as part of Liverpool Innovation Park. In spite of three million visitors, there was a financial loss. Whereas the excess income raised by the 1851 Great Exhibition paid for the Victoria and Albert Museum, here there were to be no spare funds for the 'Prince Leopold technical, artistic and industrial school'.

Liverpool Council tried to re-coup their loss by staging a Jubilee exhibition the next year but sadly their efforts were outshone by Manchester's.



References:

1. Official catalogue of the Liverpool Exhibition
2. Exhibition journal – programme and Guide to the Exhibition.
3. 'All about the Liverpool Exhibition' together with a concise guide to Liverpool and all places worth seeing on the Cheshire side of the river.
4. 'Some of the sights for visitors', 'Sights for Excursionists at World's Show' K. C. Spier, Library superintendent, published by the council.
5. Programme for the Opening Ceremony
6. Daily programme of events price 1d.
7. Ye Edge Hille Presse, a 'monthly magazine of useful and interesting information for Edge Hill, West Derby, Wavertree and the Toxteths'
8. The Liverpool Review, Courier and Mercury and the Post.
9. www.studygroup.org.uk/Articles/Content/69/Liverpool%20Gypsies.htm
10. <http://1886le.ftldesign.com>
11. www.oocities.org/johnhussey1@btinternet.com/shipperies.htm

RETROSPECTIVE

On March 25th we again gathered at Liverpool's distinguished Artists' Club. The meal was followed by a report from Joseph Sharples on his current work in Glasgow. Joseph and his co-worker on the Mackintosh project have summarised their activities in the Winter 2010 edition of the CRM Journal, from which these details are extracted:

Looking for Mackintosh Architecture

'Mackintosh Architecture: Context, Making and Meaning' is a new three-year nine-month research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and based at the University of Glasgow's Hunterian Art Gallery. Joseph Sharples and Nicky Imrie took up their posts as project researchers in May 2010, and here outline some of the resources they are using.

Among the treasure trove of Mackintosh-related documents and drawings in the Hunterian are the 'job books' of the architects John Honeyman and John Keppie. They are a fascinating day-by-day record of the firm's activities. Five cover the period 1889-1914, when Mackintosh was an assistant and later a partner with Honeyman & Keppie, and they contain invaluable information about some two hundred and seventy architectural projects with which he might have been involved.

Identifying exactly which of these projects Mackintosh worked on is not a simple task. His handwriting appears frequently, but it does not seem to be a reliable guide to the authorship of individual designs. Queen's Cross Church (1897-1899), for example, is universally recognised as Mackintosh's work, but the job-book entry was not written by him. This may be because he was not a partner at the time, and yet his handwriting does feature in earlier entries, and its significance is a puzzle which we hope will become clearer as we do more research. Ultimately, however, questions of authorship can only be decided by investigating a wider range of documentary sources and by examining the buildings themselves

Other essential research resources include the collections of historic architectural drawings held in local council archives. Anyone intending to build in Mackintosh's day had to submit drawings to the relevant Dean of Guild Court, Master of Works or Public Health committee - the equivalent of making an application for planning permission today. The drawings and associated records for Glasgow, Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire have helped us enormously in identifying problematic job-book entries. Drawings, of course, also allow us to gain insight into the design process: in some cases more than one set were submitted and the variations can be significant. They also help us to understand the interior layout of buildings which have been altered or demolished.

Once identified, the final stage in investigating a building is to go and see it. Owners and occupiers have generously opened up their homes and business premises, allowing us to compare drawings and information from other documentary evidence with the finished building. Some of the private houses we have visited so far have not previously been published or studied, so there has been a real sense of discovery in investigating them for the first time. Another aspect of these site visits is that valuable information can come from meeting owners and occupiers: as well as having an intimate knowledge of the fabric, they are often a source of 'unofficial' history, handed on from previous owners. Gradually, we are building up a fuller picture of the wide range of buildings on which Mackintosh may have worked. The challenge that lies ahead is to identify his contribution to their design.

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You may have seen an item in the current 'Victorian' (p.23) relevant to Guy Snaith's comprehensive June tour of work by Francis Doyle and Norman Shaw. In the same way as Shaw's vicarage (1885-7) perfectly complements Pearson's sublime St Agnes in Ullet Road, so at Wirral's Thurstaston the Shavian lychgate (c.1900) on the northern corner of the churchyard leads to Pearson's marvellous St Bartholomew (1883-6). Within, the organ case of 1905 is by Shaw, as is the tomb of Thomas Henry Ismay in the churchyard. Close by is Shaw's former stable block and lodge for his sadly short-lived Dawpool (1884-1927). As Guy explained (and as Joseph Sharples illustrated in his "Merchant Palaces"), T. H. Ismay, owner of the White Star Shipping line, employed Shaw (a personal friend) and Doyle for this "grandly overpowering" house. He then financed Pearson's rebuilding of the Thurstaston church. In recent years the Victorian Society has been concerned about insensitive reordering of St Bartholomew's miniature interior. An upgrading to II* is the pleasing result of these objections.



Graham Fisher, Guy Snaith and Norman Shaw... photo by Roger Hull, 16 June 2011

[If you fancy an interesting Wirral tour, Route 77 leaves Woodside every hour, Monday to Saturday, from 8.31am to 5.31pm, reaching Thurstaston's new roundabout 46 mins. later.]

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Nick Roe's imaginative tour of Oswestry presented an architectural dilemma. Highlight of the walkabout was a most sophisticated Town Hall, dominating its small sloping square which must have had a real Continental feel in the days before T. M. Penson's classical Powis Market was pulled down in the early 1960s. The Mixed Renaissance style of the 1892 Town Hall is credited to H. A. Cheers, and hereby lies the problem in that Cheers was never forgiven for the obtrusive Town Hall he designed in Georgian Ludlow five years earlier. Pevsner called it 'Ludlow's bad luck' and few tears were shed when it was demolished in 1986. So it comes about that exceptional note is taken of the 'consultant architect' on Oswestry's Municipal Buildings - no less than T. M. Lockwood, whose characteristic Renaissance ornament was appearing at Chester's Bridge Street/Watergate Street corner in the very same year. Still, Pevsner tired of Lockwood's 'playfulness': these architects can have a tough time from us voyeurs! Lockwood was a pupil of T. M. Penson who, just a few years after Oswestry's demolished Market, was instrumental in bringing the black-and-white revival to Chester's Eastgate Street. And, on Nick's excursion, we started the day with a good look at Penson's Gobowen Station. Well restored in the 1980s, this impressive essay in an Italianate villa style contrasts strongly both with his Tudor cottage designs elsewhere for the Shrewsbury & Chester Railway and indeed with his astonishingly influential transformation of Eastgate Street. We are very conscious of that influence for some 40 years later it arguably led to the masterly St Werburgh Street, much honoured in this John Douglas centenary year.



ROUNABOUT

Recently published by the Liverpool University Press is John E. Archer's "Monster Evil: Policing and Violence in Victorian Liverpool". Well researched, it includes a 'fly on the wall' account of a police station night shift by Liverpool's foremost C19th journalist, Hugh Shimmin. There is a special offer for Victorian Society members - normally priced at £18.99 but available to us at £14.99 (plus £2.75 p & p). Order directly from Janet Smith on 0151-795 2149 or at janmar@liverpool.ac.uk quoting 'Victorian Society offer'.

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Appeals to members: while appreciating that the group is only incidentally in the 21st century, it would make good sense for those of you on e-mail to give the details to Diana Goodier on the booking form. Certain local events of potential interest might well be relayed online. It would also be helpful if any regular lecture attenders with experience of PowerPoint presentation made that known to me.

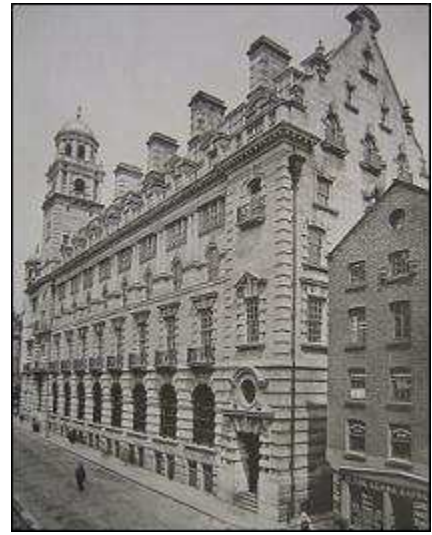
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You will know that the national Society is calling on members to nominate Victorian or Edwardian buildings that are at risk in their local area. Buildings don't have to be listed to be nominated but they should be at risk, perhaps of demolition, from insensitive development or simply neglect. Deadline for nominations is 17th July. Find out more and submit your nominations : www.victoriansociety.org.uk/news/topten

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Meanwhile English Heritage's annual 'Heritage at Risk' register (published in October) will this year stress INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE AT RISK. Members of the public are invited to visit www.english-heritage.org.uk/industrial-heritage-at-risk for information re posting supportive photographs and comments on favourite industrial buildings. Our Group did promise more attention to industrial archaeology, beginning with February's unique slide presentation on the construction of the Manchester Ship Canal. We will have a talk on the Isle of Man's Laxey Wheel early next year, with probably a later lecture on the Overhead Railway.

Francis Doyle and Norman Shaw analysed, 16th June 2011 walkabout.



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Further giants by the Liver's Walter Aubrey Thomas: Tower Buildings 1906-10 and Hanover House (former Crane Building) 1913-15.



Photos by editor, Graham Fisher