

The Victorian Society: Liverpool Group Newsletter

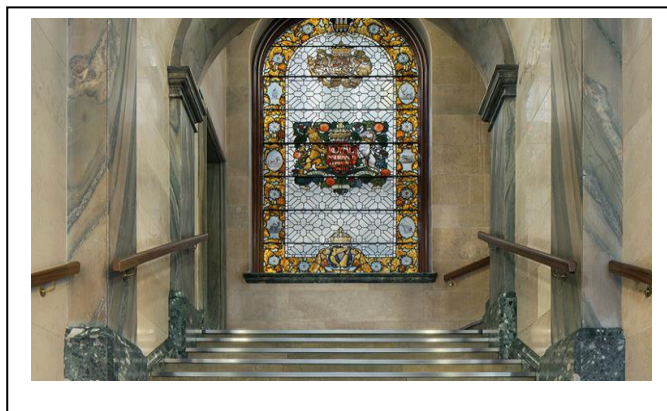
January 2015

The Society for the study and protection of Victorian and Edwardian architecture and allied arts. HQ: 1 Priory Gardens, Bedford Park, London W4 1TT. Tel 0208 994 1019. Website: www.victorian society.org.uk

Liverpool group officers: Chairman: Tony Murphy, Vice-Chairman: Guy Snaith, Secretary: Annette Butler, Treasurer: Roger Hull, Activities Bookings Secretary: Diana Goodier, Committee: Christina Clarke, Terry Edgar, Graham Fisher, Andrew Richardson, Mark Sargant, Joseph Sharples, Keith Truman, John Vaughan

Apologies for the delay in sending out this newsletter. Could I remind everyone about the AGM to be held on SUNDAY February 1st 2015 2.00 pm at the Unitarian Church, Ullett Road, Liverpool. AGM followed by a talk by BARRIE and WENDY ARMSTRONG on the Arts and Crafts movement in Yorkshire . Cost £4 You can pay at the door! Please support us at the AGM

James Doyle's Royal Insurance building, recently semi-derelict, has been transformed into **ALOFT LIVERPOOL** No. 1 North John Street. Joseph Sharples calls it " this extremely impressive baroque pile has a landmark tower capped by a gilded dome, and the façade incorporates a frieze by C. J. Allen. " It is well worth a visit to reception to view this fantastic late Victoria building (1896-1903) and how it has been restored. The grandeur has been maintained and the outside restored to its former glory.



Welcome to 2015 and to the Golden Jubilee of the Liverpool Group of the Victorian Society. We have plans for a Celebration Dinner on November 10th, in the splendid setting of Norman Shaw's Albion House on James Street, in the shadow of Queen Victoria and in sight of the "Three Graces", so let us hope for a memorable event and a progressive future for the Group and for the Society.

There are many positive signs in Liverpool, not least the recent publication of **Liverpool: World Heritage City**, edited by Peter Figueiredo, backed by Peel Holdings and published by the Bluecoat Press. It gives a clear outline of the World Heritage site, its six main townscape elements and the buffer zone around it, including the two cathedrals, paying due attention to the visible impact of change and, in each specific section, noting areas or buildings "In Need of Attention": "special attention should be given to the mass and scale of development so that it does not unbalance the cityscape and detract from the prominence of the Pier Head buildings and the historic city centre".

That was certainly a strong theme at the launch of the book, at Liverpool Town Hall, and particular mention was made, by several speakers, of Liverpool's Victorian heritage. Grounds for hope, then; that certainly seems to be the case in the hotel sector. We will be able to enjoy Albion House in November; the former Royal Insurance Building, J. Francis Doyle's masterpiece, has been beautifully and sympathetically converted into a splendid hotel and restaurant-bar by ALOFT developments, and is well worth a visit; the development of the former municipal offices on Sir Thomas Street has been slower, perhaps, but we can continue to hope for another worthwhile conversion there. Richard Pollard does say of the Conservative Club ("lavish French Renaissance, with a balcony, and cherubs in the first-floor spandrels in the manner of Sansovino. Impressive staircase inside.") that it was being converted into an hotel in 2005. Let's hope the economic prospects are brighter as we begin 2015.

Graham Jones certainly pointed to some of the difficulties in the Q&A after his excellent talk on Peter Ellis. Saving this architect's just-surviving shops on Park Road might be quite a challenge. Not so drastic, perhaps, in terms of the buildings themselves, but certainly in terms of townscape and impact, is the emptiness at the city end of Bold Street, where the boarded-up Lyceum confronts the empty Cripps building of, at the latest, 1861. As Pollard points out, it is "an exceptionally early survival of its type. Such lavishly glazed fronts were only made possible by the new technology which facilitated the production of glass in larger sheets". No architect is listed in Pevsner, but it is interesting to compare this façade with Oriel Chambers, of 1864, and consider the dynamics of the Liverpool building scene in that era. We can but hope for positive and sympathetic use in such an important central location.

And now for something completely different! Last year, we know, was the bicentenary of William Butterfield; however, it was also the bicentenary of Ewan Christian (1814-1895), not so well known or controversial perhaps, but a key figure in mid and late Victorian architecture as the consultant architect to the Ecclesiastical Commission, a post he held

from 1851 until his death. It brought him a lot of work: 880 chancel restorations for the Commission alone, and, on his own estimation, about 218 jobs per annum of surveys and reports. A lot of work indeed, but his "exacting and capricious" (in some eyes) judgements brought enemies: G. G. Scott junior was rumoured to have shown his contempt of Christian by urinating on his Hampstead doorstep! His work brought him to Liverpool as the assessor for the first competition for Liverpool Cathedral (1884-1888) and to one of the great "might-have-beens" of Victorian architectural history, the Emerson Dome.

The whole business of the cathedral competition was beset with practical problems, not least the constricted site in St Johns Gardens, adjacent to St Georges Hall, and the related questions of style:

'The Builder' favoured a centralised "peoples" cathedral a la Wren. 'The Architect' was hostile to "a sham.....in the Gothic revival fashion that has gone out'. 101 portfolios were submitted, twelve candidates selected, and four practices invited, in August 1884, to proceed to the second stage. Forty thousand people came to the Walker Art Gallery in January 1886 to see the short-listed designs and, in February, Christian was invited to make the final decision. The poor man was struggling: he was working on the competition assessments one day a week, as well as in his spare time; he fell ill, had to go to Switzerland to recuperate, and finally reported in December.

Perhaps surprisingly, the winner was William Emerson, then in his mid-fifties and not known as a church architect. The 'Church Times' made its feelings clear; "Mr Emerson's design would make an admirable Hall of Varieties, if it ever ceased to be used in future for religious use. A subsidiary Winter Garden might be added to it without any violent severing of the unities. An illuminated fountain rising from the dome area would be most effective, and an orchestral organ might be erected in the central apse". And so on, in a battle about styles and religious positions which eventually petered out to nothing in the absence of money. Still, had it gone ahead, Liverpool would have gained THE great Victorian dome, which, in Emerson's own words, might give "a cathedral which shall be worthy of the second city of the British Empire". The illustrations give at least some flavour of what was intended and what was lost. Emerson went on to design, in James Steven Curl's words, "the epitome of 'Edwardian Baroque' magnificence", the Queen Victoria Memorial, Calcutta opened in 1921. Ewan Christian was awarded his R.I.B.A. Royal Gold Medal, something scorned a few years before by Butterfield and the "strongly opposed" Norman Shaw, who, with Scott, Seddon and others, disdained the R.I.B.A, as "a mere trade union".

Christian's best known building is the National Portrait Gallery in London (1890-1895) which is in an Italian Renaissance style. It has recently been hosting an excellent exhibition, '**Anarchy and Beauty**', about William Morris and his legacy, 1860-1960. The exhibition ended on January 11th; however, there is a very good accompanying book, by Fiona MacCarthy, who curated the show, which covers the range of his work and influence, including his impact on Eric Gill, on Abram Games and the Festival of Britain, and on Terence Conran. Should you have any Christmas gift cards or Book Tokens remaining, it might be worth a look.

A more accessible and very worthwhile purchase might be the National Museums/Liverpool University Press publication '**Pre-Raphaelite Treasures at National Museums Liverpool**' by

Dr Laura MacCulloch. It's an excellent book, well produced, well illustrated, and in addition to interesting comments about the famous, there's an extremely good section about the Liverpool Pre-Raphaelites. Unsurprisingly, the Walker holds the world's largest collection of their work; there are always examples on display and also at the Lady Lever and at Sudley. Dr MacCulloch brings out very clearly their distinctiveness as a group, the importance of local patronage, their connections to the London Pre-Raphaelite world; she illustrates this through the example of Ford Madox Brown's organisation of a memorial exhibition to support the widow and children of the Liverpool artist William Davis, who died very suddenly in 1873. There's much more, and at £9.95 it's a very good buy. No doubt, the author will be pleased to autograph copies when she comes to speak to us in March. Her theme on that occasion will be her current gallery, Royal Holloway College and its great Victorian collection, though there may well be some questions or memories of Liverpool.

We have other interesting speakers this session. John Tiernan will give us the fruit of his latest research into Thomas Shelmerdine and his work, and Colin Simpson will discuss the Della Robbia Collection at the Williamson Art Gallery and his plans to develop it and to make it better known. We hope to follow up his talk with a visit to the Gallery, and a look at Oxton, on **March 25th**, starting at the Williamson at 1.00pm.

The main Spring excursion will be to Northampton, to see the Mackintosh house at 78 Derngate and, if time permits, some of the other interesting Victorian buildings in the town centre. This trip is scheduled for **April 29th** and will be by train. There are various options for advance bookings: via Stafford and Rugby (changes at both stations in each direction); via Birmingham (one change at New Street in each direction); or with a day-return to Crewe and a West Midlands Day Ranger ticket, valid from 09.30, which gives freedom of choice of routes/timing. The **09.04** departure from Lime Street is the suggested outward train. It fits for all the suggested options and we will meet at Northampton at **12.30** to go forward to the house. The return journey will be around **17.00**: the **17.16** train from Northampton gives connections for all options but the change at Rugby for the Stafford connection is quite a tight one.

Our Wrexham excursion on **June 16th** is much more straightforward: meet at Chester Station at **11.00** for the local bus onward to Wrexham, where Nick Roe and the Civic Society have arranged an interesting programme for us, including visits to the Parish Church and the Catholic Cathedral.

Woolton Village on **July 22nd** can be reached by car, bus or foot (for a few). We will meet outside the Post Office at **12.00**. and go on to see the Parish Church, the Catholic church, the Victorian Swimming Bath and some the grand houses (from the outside only). Buses 75, 76 and 78 all go from Liverpool city centre to the village; the 81 goes from Bootle through Walton, West Derby, Broadgreen, Childwall and, in the other direction, from Speke; the 89 goes from St Helens via Prescot and Huyton and also from Speke.

Anyone with the time and opportunity to travel further afield might enjoy a visit to Exeter. The Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery, newly refurbished and (echoes of Emerson) celebrating its dome, is currently hosting 'Art and Soul', an exhibition focussing on Victorian art and design in the South-West: Burges at Knighthayes; Tyntesfield; Lethaby

(born at Barnstaple). Highly recommended by Michael Hall and on until April. Exeter is always worth a visit so the combination of exhibition and associated locations might well make for an enjoyable spring break.

Let's hope it turns out to be a Golden Year in every respect. Look forward to seeing many of you at the AGM on February 1st at the Unitarians, and to an enjoyable and successful programme of events.

The next Newsletter will include details of the Jubilee Dinner. Meanwhile, Bon appetit for 2015.

TUESDAY 10th NOVEMBER 2015 – Anniversary Dinner & Lecture

This year our Group celebrates its 50th anniversary. Seven years after the Victorian Society was founded in London, the Liverpool Group was the first regional group to be established. To mark this anniversary we are holding a Golden Jubilee **Dinner** on Tuesday 10th November at **30 James Street** Liverpool, the recently restored former headquarters of the White Star Line, owners of RMS Titanic, which is now a leading hotel.

Opened in 1898 the eight-storey White Star Building was the first 'modern' office development on the waterfront, predating the 'Three Graces' across The Strand. Designed by Richard Norman Shaw, with the involvement of local architect James Francis Doyle, it transformed the context of commercial office development in fin de siècle Liverpool. Our dinner and lecture will be held in the architecturally innovative former General Office, now the hotel's 'White Star Grand Hall', on the ground floor of this landmark building.

We are delighted to be welcoming back as **our guest speaker Professor Andrew Saint**, who last spoke to us in 2012 to mark the centenary of Shaw's death. A distinguished architectural historian and professor emeritus of Cambridge University, Professor Saint wrote the definitive architectural biography of Richard Norman Shaw. Amidst the exposed girders and visible riveting of the splendidly restored White Star Building, we shall be treated to the leading authority on Shaw speaking to us about this great architect who did much impressive work on Merseyside.

Tickets for this event are priced at £37 each, which includes a three-course meal, excluding drinks. A licensed bar will be available throughout the evening. Booking details will be available later, but please **put this date** in your diary now (6.30pm for 7.00pm).

Can you help? The Liverpool Group would like to offer others a chance to share in our celebration, to hear Andrew Saint's lecture and to have a chance of seeing inside this famous Liverpool building, which is so closely associated with the city's maritime and commercial history. If you know of any societies, groups or associations whose members would be interested in knowing about this event please let us know! (Groups' names and contact details to Mark Sargant mark.sargant@btinternet.com or 0151 632 4807) Thank you.



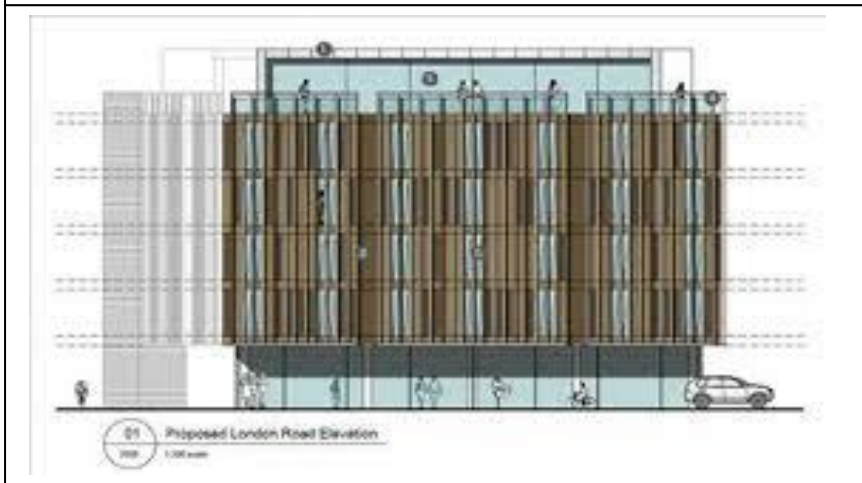
A less happy event after the successful resurrection of the two buildings above is the prospect of demolition or radical reconstruction of **Salters Building**, 4-10 Pembroke Place, Liverpool, L3 5QR. Opportunity to Build a Student Development with Planning Permission for 94 Self Contained Studios, with Ground Floor Commercial Accommodation

- The planning application was approved on the 19th August 2013 Application No. 13F/0903. The proposed new build provides 94 self contained studios with the ground floor benefitting from A1 Retail, A2 Office, A3 Restaurant / Café, A4 Bar, and A5 Hot Food Takeaway Consent with associated student management office / refuge / cycle store / student laundry plant and equipment.
- Proposed Ground Floor Commercial: 244 sq.m (2,626 sq.ft).

Unfortunately not much is known about the provenance of the building or even how old it is. It is not listed in Joseph Sharples' Pevsner guide to Liverpool. The ground floor currently houses a discount bedroom furniture shop.



The photograph shows the Moor Place elevation of a pub at 2, Pembroke Place, which is included in the plans. Florence Gersten says that the application has been rejected but it has gone to appeal and she is not hopeful. Although labelled 'London Road elevation' it would actually be on Pembroke Place.



Key features

- Opportunity to Build a Student Development with Planning Permission for 94 Self Contained Studios, with Ground Floor Commercial Accommodation
- Existing Building Benefits from Income of Approximately £80,000 per annum
- Close Proximity to School of Tropical Medicine, Royal Liverpool Hospital, Liverpool University Campus, and Liverpool Lime Street Station

Port Sunlight War Memorial

This has now been awarded Grade 1 listed status “making it one of the most important memorials in the country.” The memorial was designed by William Goscombe John, well known on Merseyside. Entitled “Defence of the Home” it depicts not only soldiers but women and children.

Mrs Gaskell’s family home 84 Plymouth Grove, Manchester M13 9LW

Annette Butler writes: A few years ago we made a visit to this house, then very much a building site, having been neglected by previous owners. Manchester University (who used it for accommodation) and, presumably for financial reasons, sold off a substantial part of the garden to the villa which is now a block of rather drab flats (c.1970’s). You have to try to imagine or view rather old photographs of how it used to be: Plymouth Grove was from the 1840’s a very upper-middle class leafy suburb.

The house is looking excellent and is staffed by volunteers from the charitable owners: The Gaskell Society. It is open three days a week on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Sundays 11 to 4.30pm winter. Check if there is any alteration from March onwards. Charges: concessions £3.95, full £4.95 but ticket valid for 12 months. What is left of the garden is being planted with flowers and shrubs, varieties the Gaskells would have planted.

Well worth visiting or revisiting with parking on the park side of this corner property.



There's to be a major change in the stewardship of England's historic buildings. From April 2015 a new charity, retaining the name English Heritage, will run the National Heritage Collection of historic properties. A new advisory body, Historic England, will champion the wider historic environment and provide support for stakeholders in the heritage sector. The changes will come into effect on 1 April 2015.

While all English Heritage properties will remain in public ownership, it's being encouraged to make the most of commercial and philanthropic opportunities. Extra Government investment will be used to tackle urgent conservation defects and renew outdated visitor amenities.

Ministers insist that the advisory body Historic England will continue to be source of expertise with powers in the areas of planning and heritage protection.

Historic England's first [Corporate Plan](#) has been made available for consultation and the new body welcomes your [views](#).

MEMBERS NEWS

Graham Fisher reports the death of Grahame Hodgson who died 13/8/2014 aged 81. Grahame joined the group on a memorable Caroe day in 1991, becoming a regular attender for the next twenty one years.