

THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY

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

LIVERPOOL GROUP NEWSLETTER

July 2012



Ould's Hill Bark

EXCURSIONS

Saturday 8 September 2012 – BIRMINGHAM

A new departure for our Group in travelling by train. Tony Murphy plans a slow 'circular' walk round Birmingham city centre, to include the new Bull Ring/Selfridges developments leading to St Martin's with its stunning Burne-Jones window, then on to the Aston Webb & Ingress Bell Victoria Law Courts (taking advantage of access on this Heritage Open Day) before St Chad's for appropriate reflections on the Pugin bicentenary. St Philip's Cathedral will follow for its superb Burne-Jones (he had been baptised in the church), the afternoon concluding at the Museum and Art Gallery.

(Depart Lime Street Station by 9.04 am train. Book day return to Birmingham New Street: current return with a Senior Railcard is c.£22, reduced to half that if booked well in advance. Tony Murphy will 'round up' the Group on board that train. If this train is unavoidably missed, please make own way from New Street Station to join Group at St Martin's in the Bull Ring. The Group's return from New Street Station will be on the 5.36pm Liverpool train. ((There is the option of later returns for those who wish.)) A packed lunch is suggested but not essential. Any uncertainties: please contact Tony on tel. 0151-428 7655. There is a £5 event charge, to cover notes and donations, to be made in the normal way to Diana Goodier not later than 31 August.)

Thursday 4 October 2012 – AFTERNOON IN WIRRAL

Graham Fisher will lead a celebratory tour of domestic and ecclesiastical work by key Victorian and Edwardian architects. We will start with a half-hour Port Sunlight perambulation, seeing the links between John Douglas and his star pupil Edward Ould (here in partnership with George Grayson), before admiring the later work by James Lomax-Simpson (who had been articled to Grayson & Ould). The coach's route is via work by Douglas and by Lomax-Simpson at Thornton Hough, before reaching the 'national' talent of George Street at Barnston, J. L. Pearson at Thurstaston (we see his unique St Bartholomew), and Norman Shaw for a celebration of his centenary at the Dawpool Stables. Acknowledging the Octavia Hill centenary as we then drive past one of the National Trust's first acquisitions, Thurstaston Common, overlooking as it does the afternoon's highlight: Edward Ould's half-timbered masterpiece, 'Hill Bark', the 1891 house that was moved piece-by-piece from Bidston by 1931. An hour's stop here will include refreshments and a tour of the 5-star hotel's available rooms. We will next see Street's school-room at Caldy that Douglas transformed into an arts-and-crafts gem. Lastly on the agenda is West Kirby's outstanding late Douglas church of St Andrew. The coach's return to Port Sunlight will be via Heswall (a Lloyds bank by Grayson) and Brimstage (Lomax-Simpson housing).

(Gather outside Port Sunlight Station at 1pm – never more than a 15 minute interval between Merseyrail trains from Liverpool loop to destinations Chester or Ellesmere Port or from Chester – for a half-hour walk, preceding coach departure at 1.30pm prompt, returning by approx 6pm. Cost £15. It would be very helpful if booking were made by 31 August.)

LECTURES

Saturday 3 November 2012 – 2.15pm, Quaker Meeting House, 22 School Lane, Liverpool L1 3BT (£3) LIVERPOOL, THE CENTURY GUILD OF ARTISTS AND MACKMURDO

The Century Guild is known as an early and significant example of the working associations that characterise the Arts and Crafts movement, and for Art Nouveau-ish designs a decade earlier than occurred in continental Europe. Its chief figure, A. H. Mackmurdo, had a north west connection and some of its best work was found here. Stuart Evans's presentation looks at the Guild, its background and that 'special connection', hoping that VicSoc members may suggest further pieces for the jigsaw. In fact, Carol Hardie's study of 'The Shipperies' 1886 Liverpool exhibition (July 2011 Newsletter) touched on Mackmurdo's contribution.

Saturday 17 November 2012 – 2.15pm, Quaker Meeting House, 22 School Lane, Liverpool L1 3BT (£3) VICTORIAN CROSS-DRESSING: a selection of letters to the editor

Peter Farrer is a long-standing VicSoc member who is a freelance researcher into the history of dress and in particular of cross-dressing. He has written or edited 12 books in this connection. For his talk he explains: "I include the child's frock, then older boys dressed as girls for a variety of reasons, and finally men wearing women's clothes on occasion and one or two permanently."

Wednesday 21 November 2012 – 7.30pm, Grosvenor Museum, Grosvenor Street, Chester CH1 2DD (suggested donation £3. No booking)

GOTHIC FOR EVER – the Pugin bicentenary lecture

Members will recall Father Michael Fisher's outstanding talk and subsequent guiding around Staffordshire's 'Pugin-land' to mark the 150th anniversary of Pugin's death. This year, in recognition of the bicentenary, Michael Fisher will speak on the theme of his newly published "Gothic For Ever: Pugin, Lord Shrewsbury and the Rebuilding of Catholic England". Please support this event in conjunction with Chester Civic Trust.

(Linking trains from Lime Street depart 5.58 and 6.13, from Port Sunlight dep. 6.16 and 6.31, from Hooton dep. 6.26 and 6.41, arriving at Chester at 6.39 and 6.56. Opposite Chester Station, in City Road by the Town Crier, the No 1 Wrexham bus dep. 6.52 and 7.04, stopping in Grosvenor Street close to the Museum. Evening trains from Chester to Liverpool depart at -.00 and -.30 past the hour until the 11pm train.)

**Saturday 1 December 2012 – 2.15pm, Quaker Meeting House, 22 School Lane, Liverpool L1 3BT (£3)
Paul O’Keeffe celebrating the CHARLES DICKENS BICENTENARY**

An entertainment of the great writer’s life and works presented in period. Paul has delighted us in the past as, in costume, he has become John Ruskin lecturing in Edinburgh, a rôle he has also played at the Edinburgh Festival. Help us mark Dickens and the Christmas season, followed by appropriate refreshments.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY IN 2013

- Saturday 19 January: Annual Business Meeting at Ullet Road Unitarian, with talk by caseworker Chris Costelloe (tbc)
- Saturday 9 February: Hugh Hollinghurst on the interiors of St George’s Hall at Quaker Meeting House
- Wednesday 17 April: Geoff Brandwood on Sharpe, Paley & Austin at Chester Grosvenor Museum

SAVING A CENTURY

The photographic exhibition celebrating the work of The Victorian Society will be on show, free of charge, in the Art and Design Academy of the Liverpool John Moores University, Monday – Friday (8.00 – 18.00) from 1 to 31 October.

The Art and Design Academy can best be approached via Brownlow Hill in its position ‘beneath’ the Metropolitan Cathedral, almost opposite the University Victoria Building. The exhibition has been curated and updated on free-standing banners by noted architectural historian and author Gavin Stamp, and shows the best Victorian and Edwardian buildings and structures that the Society has campaigned to save for the nation. The exhibition is a testament to the energy and vision of the early members of the Victorian Society as well as a sobering reminder of the way that public opinion and tastes change.

[Although some members will have seen this exhibition in Chester or Hawarden or Manchester, it is splendid news that we are now to have it here on our doorstep. A separate handout is enclosed with this Newsletter: it would be marvellous if every member would place this in a local shop or library, perhaps even making a few photocopies for further distribution... G.F.]

SHAVIAN CENTENARY

Richard Norman Shaw died on Sunday 17 November 1912. His fame and influence can be assessed by noting the architects who attended his funeral on the following Thursday: Aston Webb, Ernest George, Thomas Jackson, Ernest Newton, Leonard Stokes, Gerald Horsley, John Burnet, William Lethaby, Mervyn Macartney, Halsey Ricardo, Edward Warren, Edward May, John Joass, William Curtis Green.

Last year, Guy Snaith’s ‘day in the Liverpool of James Francis Doyle’ took us to the key Shaw buildings in the city centre: Ismay’s White Star Line Head Offices (Doyle superintending the construction); Castle Street’s Parr’s Bank (NatWest) (in association with Willinck and Thicknesse); and the North John Street’s Royal Insurance (Shaw as assessor of and adviser to Doyle).

Andrew Saint, in his magisterial “Richard Norman Shaw” (1976/revised ed., Yale University Press, 2010), reflects: “In Liverpool, Shaw’s work for the Ismays was crowned with more success. Before the building of Dawpool in 1882-4 [**see over and our 4th October excursion**], he had never so far as we know visited the city. Even now, the traveller with the slightest tinge of the sea in his blood or the most tenuous

love for architecture cannot fail, on arriving at Lime Street, to be caught by Liverpool's tremendous brio, and above all by St George's Hall. Shaw had causes enough besides Dawpool for return visits, and time to dwell upon the splendours of Merseyside. Greenhill, Allerton Beeches, Mere Bank [none surviving], and the taut little vicarage of St Agnes' Sefton Park all followed in the years 1883-6. Yet all were suburban house commissions in which he could pay no homage to the monumental spirit of central Liverpool. After a decade's pause the chance came, and he leapt at it. Ismay Imrie and Co. needed a new headquarters for their Oceanic Steam Navigation Company, which ran the White Star Line. They acquired a fine site near the waterfront, at the bottom of James Street... In 1897, Ismay, unhappy with the proposed interior decorations of one of his new liners, the 'Oceanic', asked Shaw to take it on. Shaw treated it as a major commission. Then, only a few weeks after her launch in 1899, Ismay suffered a fatal series of heart attacks, and Shaw was designing his tomb for Thurstaston churchyard..."



Shaw was in Street's office in succession to Philip Webb. He always acknowledged Street's influence but Andrew Saint believes that Cockerell's Liverpool work had a long simmering effect: "In his last years of practice, Norman Shaw openly wished to stand for all that was great in the contradictory geniuses of Cockerell and Pugin: in Pugin, a selfless, consuming dedication to the craft of architecture; in Cockerell, the steadfastness, the polish, and the maturity of aim which late Victorian buildings so regularly lacked".

This July's national AGM weekend is marking the Shaw centenary with an optional day (led by Andrew Saint) at Lord Armstrong's far-famed Cragside, now a National Trust property. Of this, Joe Mordaunt Crook (in his "The Dilemma of Style", 1987) has memorably written: "Shaw here created an extraordinary synthesis of Gothic and Tudor, and Midlands vernacular half-timbering, handled with almost Wagnerian panache. All the rationalism of progressive Gothic has been abandoned: that half-timbering is merely decorative and evocative. The Picturesque has returned, as though Pugin had never lived and never written. As a style it was dangerously infectious, almost a romantic contagion, spreading via Douglas of Chester and Ould of Liverpool to the lower depths of Stockbrokers' Tudor."

PUGINIAN BICENTENARY

As for Shaw, we now have a splendidly readable biography of Pugin: that is Rosemary Hill's "God's Architect" (Allen Lane 2007; Penguin 2008).

"We should have had no Morris, no Street, no Burges, no Shaw, no Webb, no Bodley, no Rossetti, no Burne-Jones, no Crane, but for Pugin" _____ John Dando Sedding (architect of Holy Trinity, Sloane Street)

While the orthodox view is that the scholarly works and ceaseless polemics of August Welby Northmore Pugin (born on 1st March 1812) had a much greater impact than his actual buildings, it has to be recognised that a designer/architect capable (when the patronage allowed) of St Giles's Cheadle (Staffs.), St Augustine's, Ramsgate, and (with Charles Barry) the New Palace of Westminster, was a pivotal player in the sophisticated ecclesiastical gamesmanship of the C19th. **St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham**, may not be of that standard, but on **our September 8th excursion** Tony Murphy will contemplate the Ian Nairn verdict: "at Birmingham the finances were just right – enough for a big church, not enough for an ornate one; Pugin adapted German brick Gothic, put on two passionate spindly spires, and made a real C19th cathedral – dusky red outside, screwed into the sloping site, marvellous amongst the factory chimneys [all gone now!]; thin, dark, and soaring inside, with incredibly tall arches and aisles."

Pugin's passions have been described as 'brilliant, blinkered bigotry' but without them the growth of the Gothic Revival in England, Europe and America would have taken a very different shape, something that Father Michael Fisher will no doubt illustrate in his **bicentenary lecture at Chester's Grosvenor Museum on November 21st**. The meteoric Pugin's initial motivations were undoubtedly devotional and sacramental, his fight against the stage-set two-dimensional frivolities of the sham Picturesque becoming a theological crusade. His message, fortified by the Oxford Movement, had a tremendous effect on the Anglicans (less so, ironically, on the Catholics with their inbuilt classical legacy) where a whole school of architects took a deeper interest in the 'science' of ecclesiology amid the general scholarly investigation of authentic medieval traditions and forms. The names of Scott and Street, Bodley, Burges and Butterfield resonate through the second half of the century: their architectural achievements may outshine those of the burnt-out Pugin (dead at 40) but it is hard to envisage their impact without his trail-blazing.

DICKENS' BICENTENARY

Dickens was born in 1812 within a month of Pugin and at one stage lived only half a mile from the Pugin family in London. But not much love was lost between them. As Rosemary Hill comments: "Dickens found himself feeling 'horribly bitter' about men who could equivocate so long about 'what priests shall wear' while the distress and unrest in the country at large continued." And it seems probable that there are Puginian elements in the character of Pecksniff in 'Martin Chuzzlewit'. But at least Pugin wrote that he had been deeply affected by the account of David Copperfield's mother's death, recalling those four deathbeds at which he himself had watched, just three years before his own early death.

Linking with **Paul O'Keeffe's lecture on Dickens on 1st December**, Annette Butler presents some facts on the great polymath's many visits to Liverpool, culled from the recently published major biography by Claire Tomalin and the earlier one by Peter Ackroyd:

The first visit to the city was a brief one in 1838 just prior to publication of 'Oliver Twist'. In 1842 Dickens and his wife Catherine departed for America from Liverpool. This first voyage was a memorably horrible crossing in a sail vessel. (The second was in 1867 in a steam ship.) In the 1840s as his sales increased, Dickens instituted 'Penny Readings' nationally so that the poorest person could hear and see him speak, and this tradition continues in our city by Christmas readings in St George's Hall. In 1844 with the increasing success of his serialised novels and stories Dickens returned to Liverpool to address no fewer than 1,300 people in the Mechanics' Institute in "a magpie waistcoat – a triumph". He danced the Sir Roger de Coverley until 3am. Dickens, as ever, with prodigious energy, never knew when to stop! This

driven personality was to prematurely age him facially and, allied with later ill health caused by unremitting work and journeys, killed him at only 58 years of age. Other venues in the city over many years included the Philharmonic Hall, St George's Hall, and Liverpool Institute (the boys' school). In a private capacity, Dickens also visited one of Liverpool's Bridewell prisons. In 1847 and 1857 Dickens was back in the city with his Amateur company of actors. 1852 and 1862 saw another series of Readings selected from the several novels, in each case their reception in Liverpool described as "dazzling" by the author. In 1866 so popular was he that 3,000 people had to be turned away from a reading in the city centre!

1867: Liverpool was one of 36 venues in a 10 week period, topped by the second voyage to USA but this time minus the cruelly abandoned Catherine who, very nobly, sent a kind message. (The lionised Dickens had considered taking his 'discreet' mistress Ellen (Nelly) Ternan along too, but this was deemed too dangerous.)

Late in 1869 Dickens brought his sensational "Death of Nancy" from 'Oliver Twist', and the popular 'A Christmas Carol' to St George's Hall (and possibly the Liverpool Institute). In his last year (March) Dickens was honoured by a great banquet there for 650 guests, with as many watching in the galleries. Two bands, one from the Police and the other the Orphans' Asylum, flags, flowers, and a silver-gilt fountain dispensing rosewater were laid on. The Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, gave speeches. Following a minor stroke Dickens conceded, "I am half dead with travelling every day and reading afterwards", but still fulfilled much of the booked readings, dying in June 1870.

The British Film Institute's National Archive contains work from 1895 – well within our period! This year there has been emphasis on Dickens, including a 1913 "David Copperfield". Locally, the archive can be accessed without charge at Wrexham Library's BFI Mediatheque. Arguably, Chaplin was the inspired inheritor of the Dickensian spirit; his 1921 "The Kid", available on DVD, remains among the most affecting movies ever made.

- Secretary Annette Butler reports -

After a long period of service, Florence Gersten has decided to leave our committee. A life member of VicSoc, she has always shown great enthusiasm and remains a regular, steady presence. Florence has devoted vast amounts of time monitoring planning applications and following through with attendance at often major public inquiries over many years. This voluntary work is frequently a rather lonely task. We appreciate very much all that she does.

G.F. adds: Piloti has described Florence as indomitable: there's no better word to describe her perusal of planning applications, sensing troubling limitations and arguing for improvement. Liverpool owes more than it realises to her persistence over a long period - as we are reminded in seeing Harrison's Lyceum again standing somewhat forlornly.

Welcome to these new Group members – Margaret and James Calloway, Susan Samuel, Adrian Kermode, David Marsden, Stephen Sinnott.

GLADSTONE MEMORIAL IN SEAFORTH

Heritage Lottery Fund have informed Brenda Murray that they will pay the balance of £4,000 to add to the £14,500 which Brenda has raised from many sources, some rich, but the majority rather less so, for the Gladstone Memorial (sculptor: Tom Murphy). However, the Heritage fund will not cover future maintenance. Also the quid pro quo of the Fund is a requirement for all sections/age groups of the community to be made aware of the memorial and Gladstone's significance in the form of talks, a history play etc., and provide insurance for the memorial bust. Assuming conditions are met, the memorial will be unveiled by Frank Field, MP, in the grounds of the church of Our Lady Star of the Sea, Seaforth, at the end of September.

Brenda has worked tirelessly on her own initiative and deserves the highest praise.

Society members and friends have already contributed to a rich half-year: Peter Boughton on Chester's artists, Geoff Brandwood on Austin & Paley, Neil Jackson on Japanese influence on Glasgow, David Casement on the Laxey Wheel, Nicholas Beattie on Thornely and Reilly at Wavertree, John Tiernan around Sheldermine's branch libraries, Tony Murphy at Wakefield and the Yorkshire Sculpture Park... If you have any notions for talks or trips, please don't hesitate to get in touch with the committee.

COMMENTARY

Liverpool – for good or ill – continues to maintain a high profile. In recent months it has rarely been out of the sights of ‘Piloti’, whose ‘Nooks and Corners’ alone makes “Private Eye” essential reading. He enlivened Christmas by voting the Pier Head Museum of Liverpool the worst new building of 2011. “The museum most resembles a twisted shoe box. Each end sports a large and ugly rectangular window. The whole thing is a cheap rip-off of Zaha Hadid’s Deconstructivist style. Inside, the garish, populist displays are at odds with the architecture while the one grand architectural feature, a dramatic central circular staircase, rises up to meet a cheap and nasty suspended ceiling... The total cost of this dreadful building was £72 m - £11m of which came from the Heritage Lottery Fund. What was it thinking of? The only person who objected to the planning application for the Museum was Wayne Colquhoun of the Liverpool Preservation Trust. Not that Liverpool cares; puffed up by being European Capital of Culture in 2008, the city authorities seem indifferent to the fact that UNESCO is considering removing its World Heritage Site status because of the monstrous Liverpool Waters scheme for the redundant docks further north proposed by sinister Peel Holdings...”

It is true that we are dealing with the C21st here but the Museum’s position, along with the Mann Island blocks, does have immediate impact on our Victorian and Edwardian interests. Still, as was recognised in a discussion at our Chester AGM, Piloti’s verdict is undoubtedly an extreme one, making us reflect again on the subjectivity of many of our architectural verdicts. History is littered with surprising opinions – not least in Liverpool with Picton’s verdict on the Albert Dock (“simply a hideous pile of naked brickwork”) or Professor Reilly’s put-down of Oriel Chambers (“a cellular habitation for the human insect”) – but surely these are preferable to bland acceptance. Anyway more ‘considered’ views have been available on the Museum of Liverpool, among them this by Edwin Heathcote in the ‘Financial Times’ (16.07.11):-

“Some buildings need to be criticised from the inside out, others are more about their impact on the city. The Museum of Liverpool is the latter. It does some things very well, others less so. The most successful thing about it is that, although it is a sculptural, theatrical piece of work, the architects have been careful not to attempt to compete with the massive iced wedding cakes of the Three Graces. It acts as a kind of architectural hinge that links the dark, solid pudding of the Albert Dock. The surrounding landscape is part of a surprisingly impressive urban design which includes a new extension of the Leeds Liverpool canal by the huge multi-disciplinary practice AECOM [*I agree strongly here but the canal extension was opposed by the Victorian Society!!*].

But there are issues... Danish architects 3XN’s ideas have been broadly retained despite the handover but something about the wide-screen ends, the convoluted geometry, the way the stone-clad upper floors sit uncomfortably atop the glazed ground floor, feels unresolved. Ultimately it is clever, sophisticated and civic but not beautiful... I don’t think I’ve ever criticised a building for being a good neighbour and a fine piece of civic planning, yet there is a kind of confident Scandinavian modernity here that is too conflict-free, too happy in its perverse form. It has the appearance of a tourist, enjoying the view. Perhaps that’s fine, perhaps Liverpool is content staring blankly, with a nostalgic smile, at its own iconography.”

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Meanwhile, the ‘Observer’s’ first-rate architectural correspondent, Rowan Moore, has written powerfully (‘Say no to this scouse Shanghai’) about the threats implicit in the Liverpool Waters scheme – “a development at the scale of Canary Wharf and designed like Dubai”. He argues that, for all the talk of an ‘aspirational scheme’ which will ‘create a new sense of place’, there is nothing as yet in the images presented to suggest other than generic blandness, a point confirmed by committee members Florence Gersten and Andrew Richardson from the recent inquiry. We know that UNESCO, English Heritage and CABE all have deep concerns, although also no doubt not wishing to be vilified as blocking the prospect of “17,000 jobs”. As Rowan Moore concluded: “Eric Pickles will be lobbied to the effect that he should encourage business and localism and leave Liverpool Waters alone, but if ever a project demanded a public inquiry it is this. According to the World Heritage Convention, signed by Britain, the government ‘has a duty to protect, conserve, present and transmit the property to future generations’. Waving Peel’s project through would not fulfil this duty.”

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Looking to the past rather than the futuristic, SAVE's latest annual catalogue of Buildings at Risk finds Liverpool as something of a "Jekyll-and-Hyde". Praise first for the city's Buildings at Risk project: "a good example of what can be achieved when local authorities take the lead and adopt a strategic approach. In 2002, about 12% of Liverpool's listed buildings were officially at risk - almost twice the national average. That figure is now under 5%, following a concerted campaign by Liverpool City Council and a series of community groups and building preservation trusts. The project saw £6 million invested in the city's Ropewalks merchants' quarter, which had the largest concentration of Buildings at Risk. Many of its neglected Georgian terraces have been restored, using Townscape Heritage Initiative funding, and are now home to thriving businesses and new residents. The undeniable success of this project makes it all the more difficult to understand the Council's determination to demolish countless streets of solid Victorian terraced housing in the city's outlying suburbs. Why the Jekyll-and-Hyde approach?" (The SAVE report illustrates a number of these successes. In Seel Street – nos. 29-35, 45-47, 79-85, 94-104; in Bold Street – nos. 75-79; in Princes Road – no. 5.)

And then the bad news: "it is in Liverpool where the grim legacy of the wasteful and destructive Pathfinder programme can be most graphically observed. It was here that the gravy train ran at its fullest, with hundreds of millions of pounds of public funds squandered on an orgy of destruction which has, in the words of the last council leader, left entire neighbourhoods resembling 'war zones'. Anyone strong enough to embark on the 'war zones' tour (it is not for the faint-hearted) should take in Edge Hill, Anfield, Toxteth and Bootle. After that you'll need a stiff drink." The report continues with the saga of the Welsh Streets with the council still apparently ignoring local opinion and a national change of sentiment. "SAVE has long been a fierce critic of Pathfinder, and the most vocal of the national heritage bodies in its condemnation of the programme's scorched earth policy. We have worked to lobby those responsible for the delivery of the scheme, both at national and local level, and joined forces with residents and campaign groups fighting to save their homes and protect their communities. Now with Pathfinder gone at last, we will focus our energies on bringing those houses emptied by Housing Market Renewal back to life and preventing further, senseless demolitions."

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SAVE Britain's Heritage (70 Cowcross St., London EC1M 6EJ; office@savebritainsheritage.org) was set up in the European Architectural Heritage Year of 1975. Operating on a shoestring, it has achieved miraculous results. Its new catalogue has a few more Merseyside items of interest. Its Buildings at Risk register illustrates Bidston Observatory ("owned by a developer who would consider offers"); Gibson House, Seabank Road, Egremont (part of the Mariners' Park Estate); St John's Church, Liscard Road, Wallasey. (The local authority contact for all three is Matthew Crook, Conservation Officer, Wirral Council, Cheshire Lines Building, Canning Street, Birkenhead CH41 1ND.) Its 'SCANDALS' section notes the demolition of the former Birkenhead Union Workhouse as part of the redevelopment of St Catherine's Community Hospital in Tranmere. The complex (remodelled by Edmund Kirby) had been turned down for listing. And an article on Town Halls, reprinted from 'The Times' by SAVE's President, Marcus Binney, focuses on Ellison's Birkenhead:

"There are few more challenging items on the heritage agenda than the splendid town halls of Birkenhead, Oldham (noted on our Sept 2011 visit), and Perth, each a magnificent example of civic pride and an imposing landmark... Most impressive is Birkenhead's Town Hall, with grand and festive Corinthian portico capped columned and domed tower. This overlooks an immense Georgian square surrounded by 63 dignified stone-faced terrace houses. The Council now occupies another listed town hall in nearby Wallasey and the museum in Birkenhead's town hall closed down a couple of years ago. Matthew Crook, the Council's conservation officer, says: 'weddings spilling out into the town square were a wonderful sight. The Council offered the building for sale and one scheme looked promising'. But recession clicked in..." Marcus Binney then points to some success stories with Town Halls. After the Victorian Society placed Oldham on its most endangered list, a newly elected council started on emergency repairs. The Society's caseworker for the North, Chris Costelloe, reported that the magnificent interiors had survived the 60s intact and were now starting to dry out after 30 years of neglect. Binney goes on to name Rochdale, Huddersfield, Batley, Cleckheaton, Dewsbury, Sheffield and Wakefield (admired on our recent trip) as Town Halls where imaginative things were happening, from wedding breakfasts to orchestral concerts, pantos, cabaret and court room amateur dramatics... "The story of these northern town halls is one of the bright spots of heritage today. Birkenhead, Oldham and Perth take note. Just opening the place to visitors and hiring a lively events manager can work wonders."

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Encouraging news in the wake of John Tiernan's splendid tour of Shelmerdine's branch libraries in mid-May: the saddest site was of Everton's former library, views being expressed that it should be submitted for the VicSoc's "most endangered buildings" list. Now Peter Elson reports ('Liverpool Echo', 15.6.12) that the first steps to fund a £5m project to buy and fully restore the building are underway – "development work will start in July and run until autumn 2013, when the full grant application will be submitted... this 'Jewel on the Hill' project is an important part of the wider regeneration activity in the Everton Park and its neighbourhood... the council hopes the building will be a centre for enterprise and education."

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Annette reports: "The Florence Institute, fondly known as 'The Florrie', re-opened in April 2012 after massive and complete restoration. The building, in Mill Street, Liverpool 8, opened as a Boys and Youth Club in 1890 as the generous gift of local Alderman Sir Bernard Hall in memory of his daughter Florence who died aged only 22. As 'an acceptable place for recreation and instruction for poor and working boys of this district of the city' it had much in common with the Gordon Institute in Kirkdale in the north end of Liverpool (visited some years ago by our Group). It continued for many highly successful years, gradually admitting females and adults generally in a wider social use. Then in 1999 a disastrous fire forced the closure of the building, which had been deteriorating somewhat. Against many odds, it has risen phoenix-like, and £6.4 million later, as an all-purpose community centre, where uses include a nursery/playgroup, various sports, dance etc. in the multi-purpose gym: a huge hall where weddings, receptions, funeral refreshments, meetings and many other activities can occur, along with a cafe. The architect is believed to be the little-known H.W. Keef; the building is Jacobean in style, with excellent terracotta features, and the copper cupola of the now-named Horrocks Tower/Observatory visible from a considerable distance. We hope to visit in 2013."

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A fine tribute to Julia Carter Preston (age 85) from Julian Treuherz in 'The Guardian' (25.01.12): "Julia single-mindedly revived the art of sgraffito ('scratched') ceramics to produce subtly textured wares decorated with intricate flowing patterns based on natural forms. Her facility for pattern-making was reminiscent of William Morris and William de Morgan... Julia discovered sgraffito as a student; perhaps she felt at home with carving and linear precision, both important elements in the work of her father, the sculptor Edward Carter Preston. As a girl, Julia modelled for her father: she once took me round the Anglican cathedral and pointed out her portrait with those of her three older sisters in the relief of Suffer the Little Children over the south door. Her uncle was another important Liverpool sculptor, Herbert Tyson Smith, carver of the Liverpool cenotaph... At social occasions and exhibition openings Julia cut an elegant yet bohemian figure with her flaming red hair, her lips painted scarlet. She wore strikingly original and brightly coloured dresses in exotic fabrics... Her work is represented in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool University Art Gallery, York Art Gallery, the Ulster Museum in Belfast, and the Smithsonian Institute Washington. In accordance with her and her late husband's wishes, the works of art from their Canning Street home have been transferred to Liverpool Hope University where a trust has been set up to preserve the collection and support student bursaries."

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Last, but not least, a note of farewell to Ian Dungavell who over the past dozen years has been such an effective Director of the Victorian Society, always hands-on, nobly preparing to swim at any endangered Baths! Ian made contact with our Group at an early stage with his lecture on Aston Webb for our 2002 ABM at Ullet Road Unitarian, followed by the national AGM weekend in Liverpool that October. I know the Liverpool Group joins with me in wishing him well: you will see from the editorial note in the July "Victorian" that as a life member he is not exactly deserting us.

Graham Fisher



Pearson & Shaw at Thurstaston

THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY

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

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