

The Victorian Society: Liverpool Group Newsletter

JULY 2015

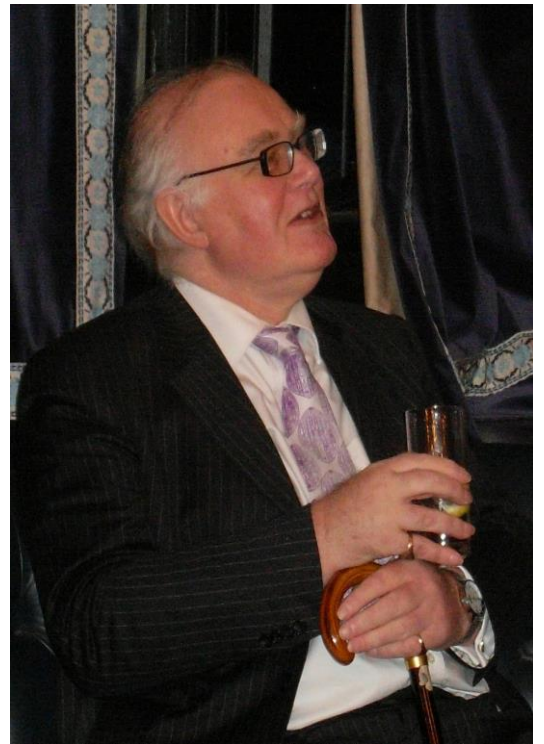
The Society for the study and protection of Victorian and Edwardian architecture and allied arts.

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Chairman's Review

Here comes Summer and another opportunity to review the events of the year thus far and to consider what lies ahead in our Golden Jubilee year.

First of all, though, a sad note. John Vaughan, our last remaining links with the foundation of the Liverpool Group in 1965, died in early May. He had been suffering from ill health and the infirmities and limitations of increasing age for some years; nevertheless, we remained hopeful that he would be able to take some part in the anniversary celebrations and his will truly be an empty chair. A memorial service, conducted by the Canon Precentor Myles Davies with an address by Canon Michael Wolfe, was held on 12th June at Liverpool Cathedral. There could hardly have been a more appropriate setting to commemorate John's life and his career of service to the Church and to the Cathedral, the University world, librarianship and its wider effects in society, and, of course, the Victorian Society. Perhaps the best way to remember him is to quote the words he found to describe Thomas Kaye, author of *The Stranger in Liverpool* (1809), which can be found in John's *The English Guide Book c. 1780 – 1870, an illustrated history* (David & Charles, 1974): "although he took (strong) party views, he was singularly mild and unobtrusive in his demeanour, and gained the regard both of friends and foes". It is a sad loss. May he rest in peace.



JOHN VAUGHAN is also remembered by one of our members some years ago when he greatly encouraged the member to undertake an MA to enrich that person's practical experience as a seasoned community worker, and followed this up by practical suggestions and sources during John's years as a University Tutor Librarian and friend.

“One Magnificent City” is the slogan for Liverpool’s summer, and the visit of the Three Queens was certainly a remarkable and moving event, as well as a showcase for the great buildings of the Pier Head and the city centre. The Maritime Museum is hosting an exhibition about another ship, the Lusitania, one of the great Edwardian liners whose heyday marked that of the city as an Atlantic passenger port. It is well worth a visit: understandably, there is a limited amount of material, but it is well displayed and there are unexpected moments, such as the music written by Charles Ives when he heard of the sinking. This was certainly new to me. The University libraries are also hosting archive displays from Cunard history, so the 175th Anniversary of the very Victorian “special relationship” is certainly being given the right sort of attention

That might not be so true of Liverpool’s Victorian and Edwardian buildings. An obvious case is that of the former Futurist cinema, of 1912, on Lime Street. Its Baroque may not be quite so inventive and riotous as its near neighbour The Vines, but it is striking and attractive, even in its current rather woebegone state, and certainly an improvement on the featureless alternative planned, which, with the student tower blocks behind, would give Lime Street something of the feel of a 1960s East European urban centre; ironic, given the national politics of the day.

Another area of concern is Pembroke Place: the March 2015 “Victorian” outlines the case for No’s 35-39, Grade II listed, and amongst the last court dwellings in Liverpool; there are also issues on the other side of the road where a fine later Victorian building, Salters Building, is under threat of demolition. We need, as a group, to be aware of how much is changing and, perhaps, to write more letters to the press and to all concerned, if the face and identity of the city is to remain distinctive. E- protest does seem to vanish rapidly into the ether.... And “twittering on” does not necessarily lead to action. As William Roscoe once put it, we need “a new Florence”.

Catholic churches may soon be another concern. The Archdiocese of Liverpool has been forced to consolidate parishes in many areas, which has led inevitably to closures: most recently Grade II

St Austin’s on Aigburth Road. Richard Pollard describes it as “a fairly conventional pre-Pugin church, but a bit grander than the norm”; many will remember visiting it on Annette Butler’s interesting and successful Aigburth visit a few years ago. The whole complex, with its graveyard alongside and 1860 school (adapted to become the Parish Hall) behind is an attractive and distinctive feature of the area, especially the tall, octagonal turrets on the West facade, “stumpy factory chimneys” to Pollard, but once crowned with spires, which must have given a ‘King’s College Cambridge’ feel to that stretch of road. All in all, it’s an important complex, yet its future is uncertain. A group has been established to care for the churchyard and gardens, but what Ampleforth Abbey intend for the buildings and land is still, at the time of writing, unknown.

Similar problems exist for a very different church, St Sylvester’s in Vauxhall, which makes its own mark on the townscape as one travels by train to or from Sandhills. It’s Pugin & Pugin of 1889, vivid in red Ruabon brick and with an unusual pyramid-roof tower standing by the street and connected to the church by a passage. However, for practical purposes, there are now too many churches and too few parishioners, and combined with the costs of

maintenance, this makes for a very uncertain future. Tom Ashley's piece in the recent 'Victorian', arguing the case for the reform of the Ecclesiastical Exemption, makes these points with clarity and strength, not only concerning the Church of England but Roman Catholic and Non-Conformist places of worship as well. It merits careful reading.

Nearby, in Eldon Street, the magnificent church of Our Lady of Reconciliation, (E.W.Pugin, 1859-60) remains in limited use. Local opinion has it that the interesting three-storey flats in Eldon Grove (1910-12) are to be refurbished, which would be good news indeed, a fitting complement to the almost Voysey-like 'cottage houses' in Bevington Street and Summer Seat. Joseph Sharples, in his **Liverpool** (Pevsner architectural guides, Yale, 2004) says that "they look like an economical attempt to imitate the style of Port Sunlight". They make an unexpectedly attractive group.

Perhaps it's time to revisit the Victorian-Edwardian survivals of this radically altered part of Liverpool and to hope that regeneration will also include restoration. The Turner Prize nomination for the Granby Project's work at Cairns Street, off Princes Avenue, is particularly welcome. Let us hope for a victory for terraced Victorian Liverpool to match the Smithfield triumph.

To return to more immediate matters; the winter-spring programme seemed to please most people. John Tiernan's talk attracted another very gratifying large attendance, and he brought us up-to-date with his further research on Thomas Shelmerdine and his background. It would be good to see positive developments at Everton Library.

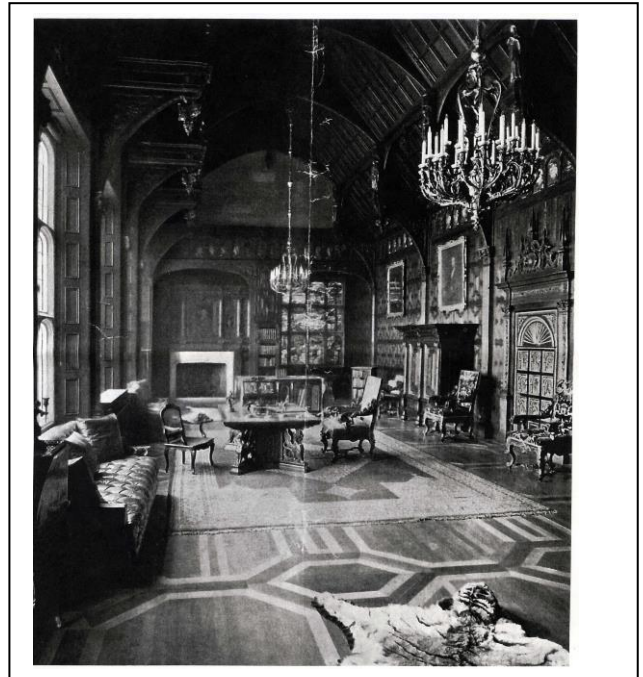
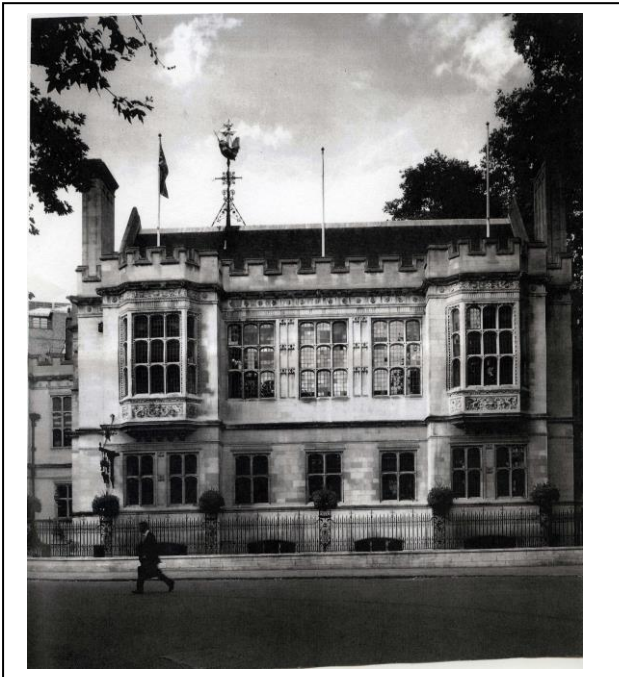
Our next speaker was Colin Wilkinson, from the Williamson Art Gallery in Birkenhead. He gave us a full outline of the brief but interesting history of the della Robbia pottery and its work, which was followed up by an excellent visit to Oxton, ably organised by Terry Edgar, which enabled us to see the excellent new display at the gallery and to enjoy a guided walk through the 'Edgbaston of Birkenhead' and its remarkable churches.

It wasn't so easy to follow up our third talk; nevertheless, the temptation is there and future possibilities may emerge, for Dr Laura McCulloch, once of the Walker Art Gallery and now the curator of the collections at Royal Holloway College, University of London, spoke with such enthusiasm and energy about one of the great Victorian experiences that all present were eager to set off as soon as could be! Laura hopes to enlarge the outreach of the gallery and to increase the opportunities for visitors, so it will be worth checking what may be on offer this summer.

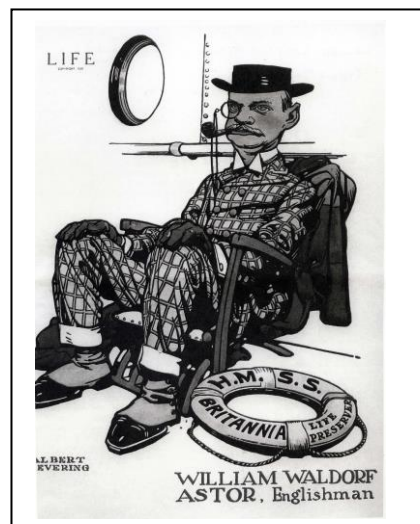
I still hope that we might, one day, be able to organise a 'Greater London Event' to include, for example, Royal Holloway, the Morris Gallery at Walthamstow, the de Morgans at Putney, Watts at Guildford...and a church or two, of course, and enjoy a comprehensive picture of the great days of the second half of the Victorian era.

One possibility for the Williamson and, for that matter, other local galleries with good and relatively little known collections, to make themselves better known, might be to make an application to exhibit at Two Temple Place, on the Victoria Embankment in the heart of London. This is a remarkable house, the work of J. L. Pearson, 1890-1895, built as the

headquarters of the Astor Estate in England, serving later as a private retreat for William Waldorf Astor himself. He was one of the richest men in the world; his wealth enabled Pearson to assemble a group of outstanding artist-craftsmen including William Silver Frith, Nathaniel Hitch, Thomas Nicholls, John Starkie Gardner and George Frampton, who produced their best work with no expense spared, so that the house (cum-office) is truly an Arts and Crafts masterpiece.



The whole Astor story, of great wealth, public triumph, yet personal tragedy is oddly moving: “deeds valued at \$100,000,000 dollars are said to rest there, yet the man himself said, of his home in Carlton House Terrace, ‘I do not sleep here since my wife died, but in the estate office on Victoria Embankment. There, at least, I am safe.’ This remarkable place is now run by The Bulldog Trust and, for the last couple of years, it has been open from late January to April to host exhibitions from ‘hidden collections’: this year ‘Cotton to Gold’ showcased the ‘extraordinary collections of the industrial North-West’, Accrington, Blackburn, and Burnley; it was a wonderful show in a remarkable setting, so why not Birkenhead or Southport at some time in the future? Look out for next year’s exhibition, whatever it may be, and if you are going to be in London, Two Temple Place is well worth a visit.



Our other springtime excursion was to the very limit of the Victorian-Edwardian remit, to 78 Derngate in Northampton, Charles Rennie Mackintosh's only house in England and in itself a remarkable triumph of restoration and conservation. We were fortunate with the weather; the trains ran on time and there were seats for all; some of us were fortunate enough to be guided by Barbara Floyer, who gave us an outstanding talk, in Liverpool in the autumn, on the house and its conservation. We were able to enjoy a leisurely and detailed exploration of this fascinating building. Derngate is run by an independent trust, which was bankrolled initially by Terry Barwell, a local millionaire, whose wife persuaded him that Northampton's culture was at least as worthwhile as Northampton's rugby (though I think they enjoyed a little more of his largesse).

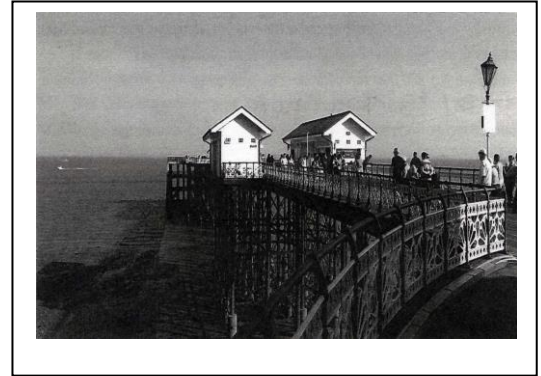
The National Trust has opened another house not so far away in the Midlands, Stoneywell, built by Ernest Gimson for his brother Sydney, as a summer home on the edge of Charnwood Forest. It isn't a big house; even NT members are advised to book well in advance; it is a charming place in a spectacular rocky garden setting and, if you are in the area, well worth a visit. Unfortunately, it is probably not practicable for a group visit.

The final Midlands possibility pulls all these things together. Compton Verney's summer exhibition is devoted to 'The Arts and Crafts House'. All their exhibitions are well thought out and revelatory; the house with its lake and garden setting is very lovely on a summer's day; Stratford is not far off; so, if you have no other plans, why not consider a few days in the Midlands and perhaps be part of a new trend? Even if not, don't forget our autumn excursion to Bournville, organised by Keith Truman and Terry Edgar, which may not boast the countryside but certainly makes up for that in architectural and social interest. Chocoholic or not, make sure you don't miss it!

As well as the Golden Jubilee, 2015 might be called 'The Year of the Two Bishops'. Nick Roe arranged for Bishop Peter Brignall of Wrexham (R.C.) to speak to us at his cathedral during our visit on 30th June and Bishop Paul Bayes of Liverpool (C of E) has been kind enough to allow us to visit the gardens of Bishop's Lodge (1869-71, Henry A. Bradley). It was built as 'Baycliff' for Samuel Blain, a Liverpool corn trader, and is an interesting High Victorian 'French Gothic' house with a notable garden façade. We meet for the Woolton Walk at 12.00 noon on 22nd July outside the Post Office in Woolton Village, which is adjacent to bus stops for the 81 (from Bootle, West Derby, Childwall/Hunts Cross, Speke), 89 (from St Helens, Prescott, Huyton, Gateacre/Hunts Cross, Speke), 75 (City Centre, Sefton Park, Allerton/Halewood) and 78 (City Centre, Edge Hill, Wavertree, Childwall/Halewood). There is parking in the village centre and also at the nearby Sainsbury's superstore.

The walk will include visits to Woolton Baths (a Victorian conservation project), the local churches, the grand houses and Reynolds Park, and should be a revelation to all those unfamiliar with 'Lancashire' South Liverpool and its Victorian history. No Bishops in Bournville in September, but an exploration of the garden suburb and its buildings should make for a full and interesting day and continue our recent series of successful visits to Victorian and Edwardian Birmingham.

Further afield, the national A.G.M. in Cardiff this year (24th-26th July) includes a Sunday afternoon visit to Penarth, and a walk on the pier. It's an atmospheric place, and the headland, which affords splendid views of the pier and of the Bristol Channel and Somerset, is crowned by Butterfield's powerful church of St Augustine, which is well worth a visit.



Victorian piers are a subject for another time: we have plenty in range, including Bangor and Llandudno, a selection at Blackpool (recently put up for sale), the 'modern' survivor at Southport and the sad one at Colwyn Bay;



Colwyn Bay pier in its glory days

one of English Heritage's last publications before this year's changes was the excellent ***British Seaside Piers*** by Anthony Wills and Jim Phillips (2014, for the National Piers Society), which looks at all the sixty-one surviving piers and reminds us of another essentially Victorian contribution to our world. A fragile one, too; Eastbourne, one of the finest of them all and the work of the noted designer Eugenius Birch (1818 – 1884), was severely damaged by fire earlier this year and restoration will be a major task.



Eastbourne Pier before the disastrous fire

Don't forget to make a note in your diaries of our autumn lecture programme. On 24th October we are fortunate to have Susie Harries, the distinguished author of ***Nikolaus Pevsner: The Life*** (Chatto & Windus, 2011). She will speak to us on 'Pevsner in Liverpool'. This will be a highlight of our Jubilee Year and I would urge everyone who is able to do so to come and hear an excellent speaker on a fascinating interpretation of the subject.

Our next speaker, Martin Strauss, on 14th November, will speak about 'Waterhouse and his work', with a focus on Liverpool. Martin has undertaken considerable research on the subject and we hope, next year, to follow up his talk with a 'Waterhouse Walk' or even, perhaps, a 'Waterhouse Day'.

Our final autumn lecture, on 28th November, is also one that must not be missed; the incomparable Brenda Murray on 'The architecture of Waterloo' in the Bicentenary year. Nothing more needs to be said. All lectures will be at the usual time, 2.00 pm for 2.15, at the Friends Meeting House.

Another event, in Manchester, may well be of interest to members and fits in well with Martin's talk.

This is the first Manchester Alfred Waterhouse Lecture, to be given by Alex Bremner of the University of Edinburgh, author of ***Imperial Gothic: Religious Architecture and High Anglican Culture in the British Empire, 1840-1870*** (Yale, 2013). His subject is 'William Butterfield and the development of colonial ecclesiology': the venue is Butterfield's church of St Cross at Clayton (alight at Clayton Hall on the Metrolink line to Ashton) on Saturday 31st October at 1.30 pm for 2.00; the cost is £10.00, to include tea, biscuits and donations. Book by contacting Mark Watson on 07831 267642 or e-mail sawpit1849@me.com.

All this and the dinner. Don't forget to book your place. To finish, though, a reminder that in these changing times, with all the building activity around us, the letter is still an invaluable way to show concern. On 12th May 2015, 'The Times' reported a 'Call for Inquiry' over the plans of King's College, London for redevelopment in the Strand. On 13th May, Griff Rhys Jones (Vice-President of the Victorian Society) had a strong letter published; "what on earth does a conservation area mean when you cannot rely on such a thing to look after the fabric of 'buildings of merit'"; other letters followed and on 21st May 'The Times' reported " Historic Strand buildings saved from demolition.....Historic England has reviewed its advice...."this group of buildings is integral to the character and appearance of the wider conservation area". Kings College indicated that it was "reviewing the options". The key to all this was "the high level of public interest". Let's keep that level high. There are plenty of people who want to see the character and integrity of all our towns and cities maintained, so let's make sure we are part of that during the next 50 years

AWN Pugin: the Liverpool Legacy by Mark Sargent

It is not hard to find, in Liverpool, buildings by Edward Welby Pugin or the later work of the firm of “Pugin & Pugin” but the city is not readily associated with the great Augustus. Cheadle, Birmingham or Ramsgate may readily spring to mind, but not Liverpool. However, throughout the 1840s he did build some significant buildings, now mostly vanished, in Liverpool. Pugin’s Liverpool legacy is now something of a ghostly presence in the city.

If we look at his local work chronologically, his first buildings in the Liverpool area were at Old Swan: **St. Oswald’s Church** (1839-41) and presbytery (1840-42). All that remains of the church is the tower and spire, one of the earliest post-Reformation Catholic church spires to be built in the north of England. Subsequent adjacent building of convent and school, as seen today probably not by Pugin himself, created a very Puginian vision of a medieval conventual community in a then rural setting. Pugin’s spire is still a landmark, sitting on the low ridge behind the city. Further in, on the edge of the Georgian town, he built **Mount Vernon Convent** in 1841-43. This was demolished in 1969. Then, in 1844-45 came Pugin’s most significant Liverpool building, **St Mary’s Church** in Edmund Street, of which a more detailed consideration will follow. At the same time, 1844-45, the Sisters of Mercy at Mount Vernon commissioned **St. Catherine’s Girls’ Orphanage** in Falkner Street, which was demolished in 1928. In 1845 Pugin produced a **design for a cathedral** for Bishop Brown, Vicar Apostolic of the Lancashire District (and from 1850 first Bishop of Liverpool in the restored Catholic hierarchy). This very ambitious design, 460 feet long, incorporated three towers, the central one to be crowned by a spire. The site of this unrealised building was to be on Everton ridge. Edward Pugin’s revised design was actually begun on this site in 1854, though it never progressed beyond the Lady Chapel, the fabric of which became the Catholic parish church of Our Lady Immaculate.

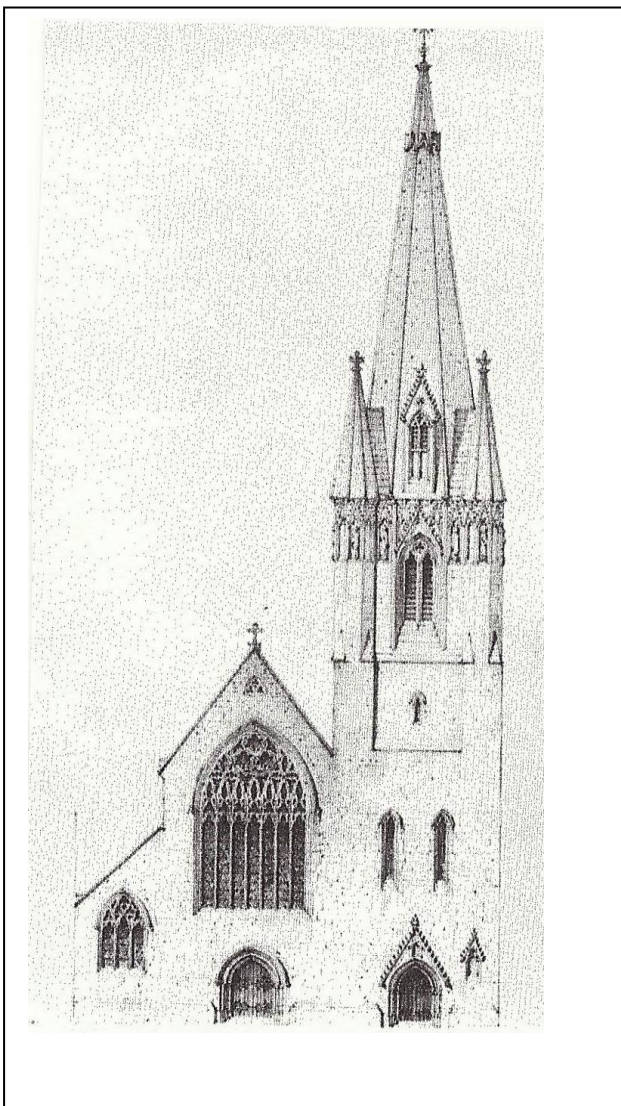
Pugin’s later work in the Liverpool area was situated in Childwall, where he was involved in several adjacent projects following the purchase, in 1843, of ‘Eton House’ and its grounds by Bishop Brown and his cousins James and Henry Sharples. The whole complex of buildings is now known as **Bishop Eton**. Firstly, in 1843, Pugin designed a house called ‘Oswaldcroft’ for Henry Sharples. Its plan was a development of the influential ‘pinwheel’ plan pioneered by Pugin at ‘The Grange’ in Ramsgate. The house (now St Joseph’s Home) and its lodge still stand, with later additions and alterations. For Bishop Brown, who took up residence in the original Georgian ‘Eton House’, Pugin designed in 1849-50 a small domestic chapel which stood adjacent to the house. This was demolished in 1857-58 and replaced by the existing larger church by Edward Pugin, although some decorative elements of the original were incorporated.

Perhaps the most intriguing of the footprints left by Pugin’s buildings in Liverpool is his great town church of St. Mary, which though completely vanished, deserves serious consideration.

St. Mary’s Church It is possible, today, to stand on the site of this vanished church which occupied the line of Bixteth Street between the Edmund Street and Ormond Street junctions, aligned along the rear façade of the Cotton Exchange. The Jesuit mission of St. Mary’s was the first post-Reformation Catholic foundation in Liverpool; in 1727 the diarist Nicholas Blundell recorded attending Palm Sunday Mass in the Edmund Street chapel. By 1841 the successor chapel, by now in the care of the Benedictines, was deemed too cramped and undistinguished to be worthy of both the town and the congregation and a new church was commissioned. Pugin, already at work at Old

Swan and Mount Vernon, produced a design for a large town church; the foundation stone was laid in May 1844 and the building was opened in August 1845. The Edmund Street site, close to Exchange Station, was hemmed in by adjacent buildings to the sides and the liturgical 'west' front to narrow Edmund Street faced tall warehouses but the 'east' front closed off (the then much shorter) Bixteth Street and the parallel carriage road approach to the station from Tithebarn Street, and so was visible from Tithebarn Street. Pugin's design included a soaring spire which would have been a notable addition to Liverpool's skyline. As with so many of his churches, the spire was never realised and the tower remained truncated at roof level.

Pugin's Liverpool church was an ambitious aisled building in the Decorated style, built by his favourite builder Myers, and capable of seating 3,000. The chancel and six bay nave were under the same roofline, with a high clerestory and no chancel arch, and the 'southwest' tower was aligned flush with the end of the nave. The east and west fronts both boasted impressive seven light windows. St. Mary's stood on Edmund Street for forty years, but by the 1880s stood in the way of the expansion of neighbouring Exchange Station and was acquired by the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway. Taken down stone by stone, it was rebuilt in 1885 by Peter Paul Pugin on a new site in nearby Highfield Street. The (truncated) tower was not rebuilt in its 1845 form, instead being redesigned as a 'southwest' porch. (Much later, an elaborate spire-let housing a bell was added to the gabled roof of this porch). The Highfield Street church was a victim of the May Blitz of 1941 and the ruins demolished; so vanished the last vestige of Pugin's great town church for Liverpool. Curiously, the original site in Edmund Street was not actually used in the 1880s rebuilding of Exchange Station and instead provided space for a northward extension of Bixteth Street, as noted above.



When the original church opened on 19th August 1845, Liverpool's oldest post-Reformation Catholic parish acquired an impressive building worthy of its status. It was Pugin's last town church, a building of architectural significance in which he developed ideas appropriate for an urban rather than a rural setting. Rosemary Hill, Pugin's biographer, considers St. Mary's to be "one of the greatest losses to Pugin's oeuvre, for it sounded themes that were to recur in debates on urban church architecture later in the century".

Pugin's legacy in Liverpool may be elusive, but it repays investigation and occupies a worthy place in the development of his style.

Mark Sargent (March 2015)

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IN MEMORIAM

ROD WARBRICK Distinguished Artist and lecturer. We had not seen him for some years due for family reasons, and latterly ill health. In past years we had enjoyed his Art lectures at the Walker and elsewhere. Our condolences are extended to his widow and family.

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