

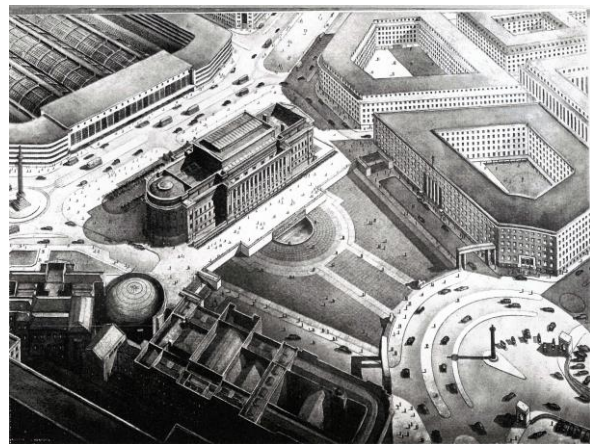
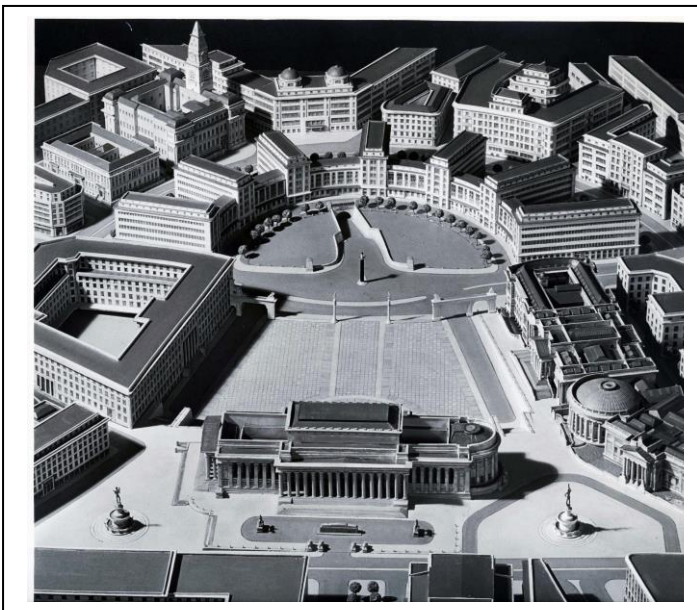
The Victorian Society: Liverpool Group Newsletter

JULY 2016

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

Chairman's Review



Two views of Lime Street area in the post War planning frenzy which had striking similarities to Hitler's vision for Berlin!

Halfway through another eventful year; they certainly seem to pass by at remarkable speed, leaving one to wonder what the next fashion in architecture or architectural history might be.

Such thoughts were on the agenda at the Regional chairs meeting held in Liverpool on 18th June. It was a crowded day: the Civic Society held their annual meeting; the new book on the Della Robbia pottery was launched at the Williamson.

The Victorians meeting was positive in outlook although there was concern about the need to boost membership and, in particular, the need to attract more young members. Another concern was the spread of essentially nondescript student housing in all our cities, threatening not only the Victorian and Edwardian heritage but also the architectural integrity of city

centres. Officially, and universally, “this is reflecting the needs of our business” [Bill Addy, Chief Executive of the Liverpool Bid Company]; alternatively, in Issue 26 of *Nerve*, Martyn Lowe states “it will produce more of a transitory population, which will have no vested interest in looking at or concerning themselves with local issues.....though, as someone from Cockneyland, I can see that there is a lot of potential to develop the centre of Liverpool as a people-based and ecologically balanced city”.

The day included a brief look at Lime Street, perhaps the most important of the current issues. SAVE has fought a good fight, supported by the Victorian Society, and there have been many voices to agree with them, including Cllr. Richard Kemp and the Merseyside Civic Society; nevertheless, things do not look hopeful and an exploration of the rear of the site is a bleak experience.



There are others: the commercial premises on Park Road, possibly by Peter Ellis, have been demolished, and the state of the ‘Welsh Cathedral’ on Princes Road is an ongoing tragedy, even though some work has been done to stabilise it.

James Hughes, Buildings Caseworker, gave an excellent presentation, highlighting Lime Street, but looking across the country at some remarkable Victorian buildings currently in real danger; the one that particularly caught my eye was Fish Dock Street in Grimsby, which leads to the remarkable port tower, but has yet to be listed. He made the point that members should be encouraged to report to him, at Priory Gardens, anything they see that is worrying. He added a personal thanks to Florence Gersten for all her work in Liverpool. We may not achieve a ‘Smithfield’ out of Lime Street but it is certainly worth the attempt to maintain the integrity of the World Heritage Site’s ‘buffer zone’. Still, we have been here before.

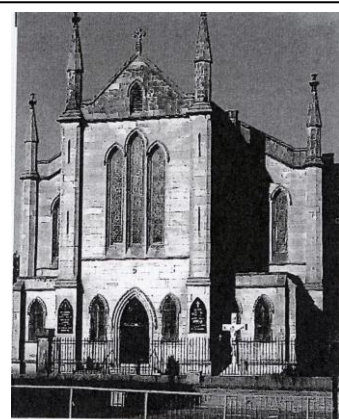
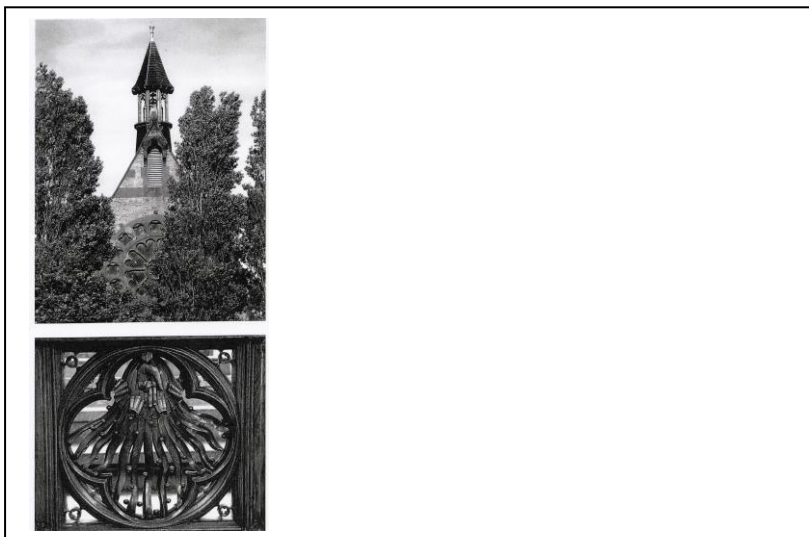
Take a careful look at the three images of how Liverpool's 'Civic Centre' might have looked had the planners had their way in the years after World War II. Not much 'conservation' going on there; not even The Crown Hotel' would have survived, and as for Lime Street Station's Foster screen and the famous roof, they would have vanished with the North Western Hotel. It makes you think.

Our speakers certainly did that. Kathy Clarke's talk on 'Bandstands', at the AGM, was a revelation, and sent people out looking for survivors in our local area. Alf Plant, of Ainslie, Gommom gave a detailed insight into the practice's conservation work on the Wirral: we were up there with him at the top of Birkenhead Priory, with the wind off the Mersey whipping round our ears and it was fascinating to get so close to the projects. Steve McKay not only spoke about the Sailors' Home, he brought a range of material from his 'survivals collection', and it was very pleasing to be reminded of the co-operation which brought the gates back to be an eye-catching part of Liverpool ONE. Our final speaker, Steve Smith, was compelling on the subject of James Lord Bowes, businessman and Japanophile; there were more artefacts to enjoy, and, it is hoped, Steve's 'Bowes Walk' might be included, in part, at least, in next year's programme. Thanks to them all and to all those who help; it is satisfying to report that all our talks enjoyed good attendances, although more people are always welcome, and if you can introduce new members, or supporters, it will be very much appreciated.

Our activities in the Spring were also successful. An intrepid group set out on the train to Sheffield, hoping to avoid the rain and to see something of a somewhat undervalued 'late Victorian' city. We were not disappointed, and those unfamiliar with the capital of South Yorkshire were impressed, especially by the impressive interiors of the Cutlers' Hall, the contrasts between the two Cathedrals, one Puginian, and the other a varied development from a mediaeval core, with some fine nineteenth century glass, the 'educational powerhouse' buildings and the splendid Town Hall. The Ruskin exhibition in the Millennium Galleries was also well worth seeing. A crowded but enjoyable day, as was our most recent excursion, this time by coach, to 'The Wonders of Salford'. Annette Butler has more on this elsewhere, but it was, quite literally, a wonder full day, replete with

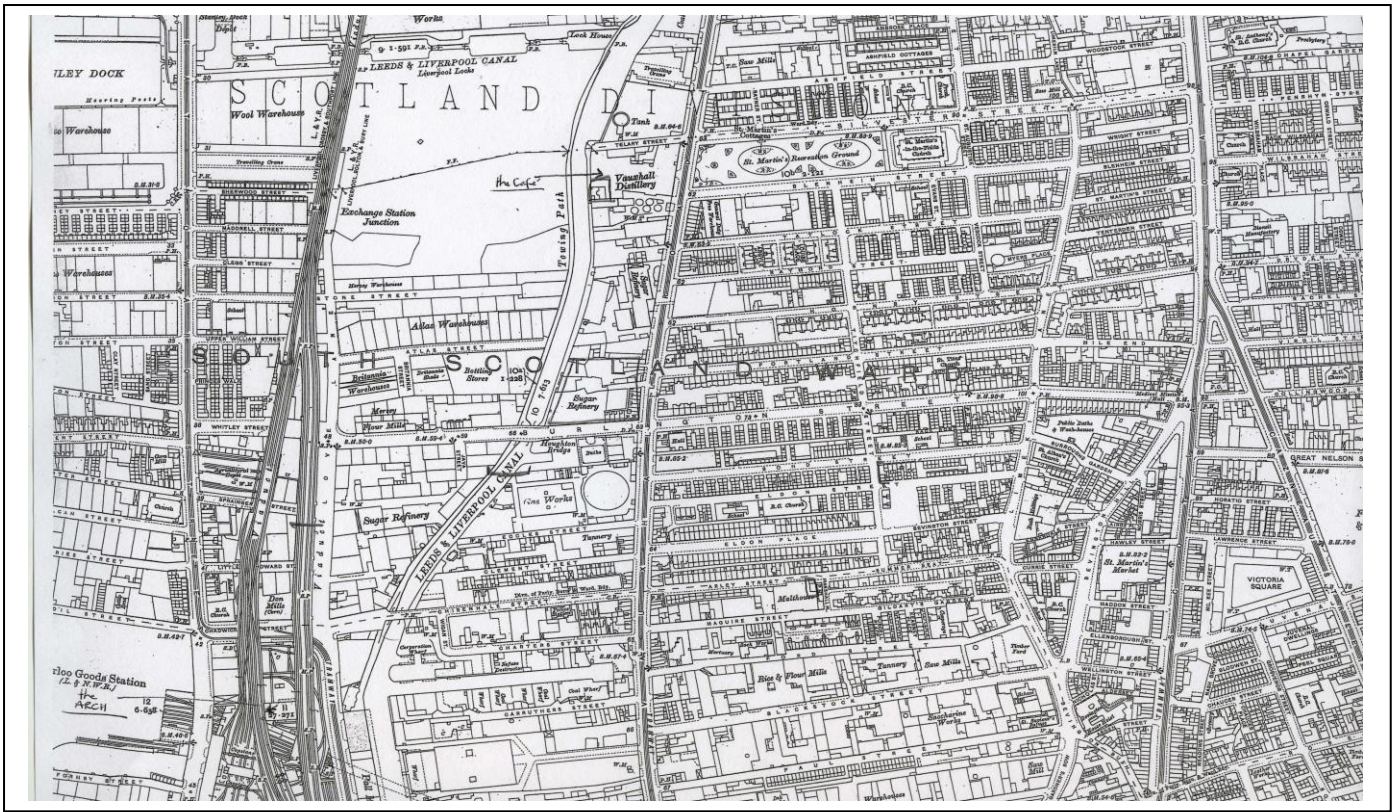
surprises and concluding with Manchester's most unexpected Racquets and Tennis Club. Many thanks to Annette for a remarkable feat of organisation.

We had a long look at an interesting Victorian church on our Vauxhall walk. This was Our Lady of Reconciliation, Eldon Street, E.W. Pugin's clever solution to the problem of creating high capacity on a low budget. The building became a model for churches, mainly but not exclusively Roman Catholic, throughout the country. An unusual feature is the altar donated by the Lithuanian community, already considerable by the 1860s, and fortunate to have a priest, Canon Hughes, who could preach to them in their own tongue. We were fortunate to have Michael O'Neill as our guide, both at Our Lady's and at St Anthony's, Scotland Road.

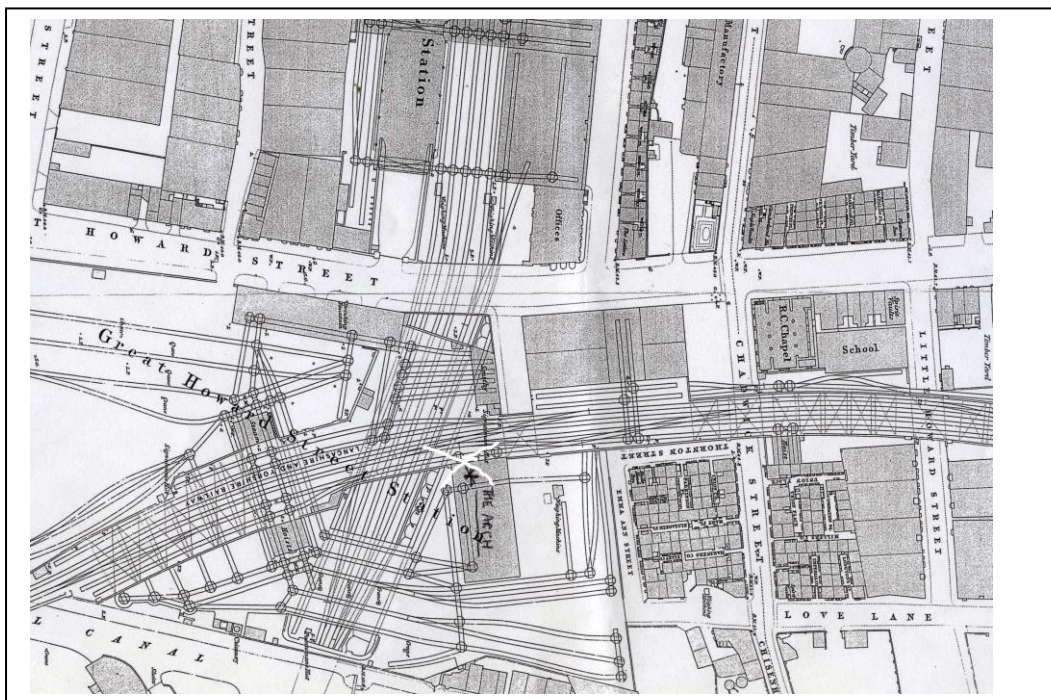


The 'stuck-on' Gothic stone west front of St Anthony of the Desert facing the Scotland Road.

He is the historian of the parishes and a great expert on nineteenth century Catholic Liverpool, and he will be looking at these churches and at St Vincent's, in St James Street, during Heritage Weekend in September. It wasn't all churches: we looked at the Eldon Place tenements, currently derelict, and the housing in Summer Seat, and followed Joseph Sharples' footsteps to the remarkable railway arch off Pall Mall – "as impressive, in its way, as the exactly contemporary vault of St George's Hall" [Joseph Sharples – Liverpool (Pevsner Architectural Guides), saw the waterless canal bridge (which might be by Brodie), looked at the surviving wall of what was, until very recently, a line of warehouses and is now "an 18-storey development offering everything from apartments to rooftop gardens....including restaurant, spa, gym, shops, car park and 366 apartments. Have a look at the map of Vauxhall from 1906 and consider the arguments about comparative population densities.



It was a fascinating look at change in the city, yet perhaps what will be remembered longest is the great canyon cut through for the Kingsway Tunnel and the discordant noise of traffic, a 'Dombey and Son' moment in our new world.



It is difficult to imagine a greater contrast, past or present, than Vauxhall and Southport. Our visit at the end of April covered the two exhibitions at the Atkinson – 'Victorian Dreamers' and 'Lord Street', which were expertly introduced by Stephen Whittle, the curator; (this Autumn will see a joint

effort by the Atkinson and the Williamson, showing their excellent collections of Victorian watercolours, which will be well worth a visit.) From the Atkinson we moved on to Holy Trinity, Huon Matear's remarkable 'Arts and Crafts' church and were given an insight into some of the major difficulties with the fabric of the building and the impact, in winter particularly, of the Irish Sea 'breezes'. Finally we visited Connard's jewellery business on Lord Street, the oldest retail enterprise on the street and with a splendid late Victorian interior. Mr Martin Connard, the current head of the family firm, was most generous, not only with time and access, but with many rather costly items from his shelves. It was a most unexpected hands-on experience and was very much appreciated; who knows? It may have been the most inspirational aspect of our programme!

There are still events to anticipate: on 20th July, the Gateacre walk, starting at St Stephen's church, with Tom Canty, historian of the parish, and a chance to appreciate at length the Burne-Jones window of 1883. We will also have lunch at St Stephen's and afterwards take a look at Gateacre Village, guided by Beryl Plant of the Gateacre Society, and take a partial view of Gateacre Grange, the home of Sir Andrew Barclay Walker, whose name is so significant for late Victorian Liverpool.

Our Autumn excursion, on 14th September, is to Burton-on Trent, to include a visit to the National Museum of Brewing, a remarkable place and a reminder also of Burton's 'Imperial' role in the nineteenth century, as well as visits to Bodley's outstanding churches at Hoar Cross, perhaps his masterpiece, and St Chad's in Burton itself. A very different but rewarding experience. It should be a good day, so book as soon as you can.

The Autumn talks and activities have something of a Bodley theme. Michael Hall, editor of 'The Victorian' and author of the recent outstanding biography of the architect, will speak about his work with particular reference to local connections: the Cathedral, Tuebrook, Eccleston, and we will follow up with a visit to St John's, Tuebrook in November, combining that with a look at Shelmerdine's Lister Drive Library and the outstanding Waterhouse building, the Liverpool Seamen's Orphanage, which Martin Strauss spoke about last year. There is a possibility, as yet no more than that, of an interior view of one of these. Bodley comes into December's activity, an afternoon visit to the Elizabeth Hoare Embroidery Gallery at

Liverpool Cathedral, where we shall have a guided tour, before going on to consider the Lady Chapel....Bodley?Scott?.. and concluding with tea in the café, not included in the cost, but giving lots of opportunity to sample their excellent cakes.

Bodley isn't all. In October, Roger Hull with the help of Brenda Murray will lead a guided walk in Waterloo, a follow-up to Brenda's excellent presentation, last year, of her 'other' favourite suburb. Brenda will be on hand in 'The Royal' for a discussion afterwards and where, once again, there will be a chance to purchase refreshments. Our other speakers are Malcolm Shifrin, whose book on 'Victorian Turkish Baths' was published last year; many will remember visiting a rather grand one at Harrogate; and Dr. Amanda Draper, who brings a light and informative touch to the 'Victorian Way of Death', quite a long way from her usual role as the Director at Astley Hall, one of England's, let alone Lancashire's, most remarkable Tudor houses. A lot of scope for questions there.

All that is to come. Before then, we have the summer. Perhaps you might like to follow Andrew Richardson's lead and explore the River Alt, if not from source to sea, then, perhaps, in Kirkby, where St Chad's (Paley and Austin, 1869-1871) is an outstanding Victorian church, or at Altcar, with its 'minor miracle' for John Douglas – St Michael's, 1879 – half-timbered inside and out.

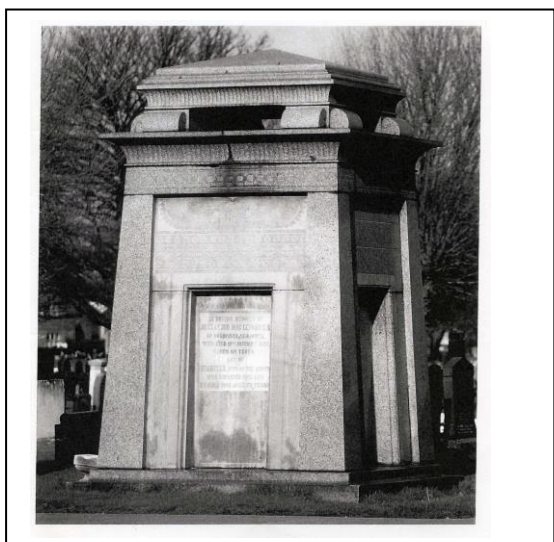


On the Wirral, Bidston Lighthouse, 'Wirral's forgotten lighthouse' is open every Saturday afternoon until 27th August and well worth the trip; it was built, in 1873, further from the shore it lit than any other lighthouse in the world!



Also on the Wirral, on Heritage Weekend in September, there will be a chance to see 'Outwood', once the home of the Heap family and now a project for St Anselm's College, a rare instance of school involvement with Victorian heritage and well worth our interest and support. We hope to have a connected 'Claughton Walk' in the 2017 programme.

One final rarity: the McLennan Monument in Anfield Cemetery, one of the few surviving 'Egyptian' monuments in North-West England, to Alexander McLennan and his wife Isabella, once residents of Seaforth, and, in his case, Chief Engineer of Brunel's 'Great Western' and, in 1859, Chief engineer of the 'Great Eastern' on her maiden voyage. As the interest in Victorian 'Egyptiana' gathers pace, this may become a site of particular interest



Further afield, we have the National AGM in Manchester on the weekend of 29-31 July. The meeting itself, beginning at 2pm on the Friday afternoon, will be held in the Great Hall of the Sackville Street Building (Spalding and

Cross, 1895-1912), now part of the University of Manchester. As always, it is open to all members and well worth the effort for those who have not already arranged their participation in the events, which are many and varied. No news so far of a Golden Jubilee Dinner for the Manchester Group. As and when we have further information, it would be good if we could reciprocate the support they gave to us last autumn; in any case, we wish them a successful Jubilee and many more years to come.

Here in Liverpool, we shall welcome the opening of R.I.B.A. North's new gallery on Mann Island (next to the 'Open Eye') in August, particularly the opening exhibition of drawings and perspectives relating to 'Unbuilt Liverpool', including, no doubt, the work of 'Edwin Lutyens: The Last High Victorian' (Roderick Gradidge's words in 1976 when we had not long joined 'Europe') and we may know more about the Civic Society's attempt to establish a 'Liverpool Architectural Biennial', making the city even more a 'Venice of the North'. After all, it will be easy to reach the new R.I.B.A. Gallery by canal, and it is not far to the re-opened Festival Gardens.

Who knows what the future holds? The Liverpool Echo recently reported the restoration, by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association Liverpool, of the former Richmond Baptist Chapel on Breck Road, designed by Sir James Picton, built 1864-1865 and listed Grade II in 1975. They do not intend to remove any of the heritage features of the building and hope to lay solid foundations for a peaceful and positive future. Amen to that.

Enjoy the Summer. We look forward to seeing everybody at many of our events, and, don't forget, – bring your friends

Annette informs us that Gavin Stamp one again accompanied the American/International Summer School of the Victorian Society on its annual UK visit, a weekend of it always enjoyably spent in Liverpool. After twenty years he is retiring and we thank him for his long interest. However, his 'nooks and corners' column under the pen-name 'Piloti' in *Private Eye* continues.

Roger went to take some more photos of Salter's Buildings (Pembroke Place) which Florence Gersten has fought to save but the future looks rather bleak as the George Pub is now boarded up and a local man said the tenants still in the building have been asked to vacate by the end of July 2016.

Visit to Salford



In June 29 members enjoyed a highly successful outing to ***the Wonders of Salford***. A day of great contrasts included a surprise visit to a local Victorian/Edwardian architect's lovely home plus other significant buildings by Henry Lord, a Paley & Austin church and two very different clubs: one for 'poor boys' and one for 'posh boys'. Our thanks to Beryl Patten and Mark Watson of the Manchester group who added so much with their commentaries and helped us to navigate and particular thanks to Gwen and Steve Ayres for sharing their home with us.

HENRY LORD, architect, (1843-1926) designed the imposing red brick / terracotta former Technical Institute (Peel Building, 1890's), listed and the oldest building in Peel Park campus, now Salford University, also the Salford Art Gallery and Museum adjacent. On the opposite side of the main road is his signature red brick style nurses home (now the unique Working Class Movement Library). Unfortunately, small circulation space there meant our group was too large to visit. Their fascinating collection of

books, posters and artefacts along with changing exhibitions is open one day a week for public tours (staffed by volunteers – see website).

Lord's own home, *the Red House* in leafy Pendleton (late 1890's) is a substantial private house which was a delight, including a gorgeous hall and many delightful features, not least a heating and extractor system in the basement.

Manchester's first municipal housing scheme was built by Lord in an award winning scheme. This includes the now famous **Salford Lads' Club** (in Ordsall, 1903/4). This inspired *the Smiths* local music group to pose for an iconic cover in the 1980's and attracts worldwide visitors. See our group photo above.

The attractive red brick houses are now Cooperative homes and open space. The later girls' club was bombed during WW2.

Other sites on our agenda were:

St Clement's Church / social centre (Paley and Austin grade II, 1880). The building closed in the 1980's and miraculously re-opened in 2005 thanks to the determination of local people. A 'Father' Willis organ is still in place and the church members were very welcoming.

Manchester Tennis and Racquets Club (1880) in Blackfriars Road, grade II by H.T. Redmayne, a pupil of Waterhouse. Somewhat austere brick and terracotta. A revelation behind 'an insignificant door' with a very comprehensive tour including as a real treat a match of *real tennis*, the precursor to modern tennis, using a special enclosed court with galleries and sloping roofs. Also courts for racquets and squash and a skittle alley. There are only 24 real tennis courts in the UK and 47 worldwide.

Collier Street baths (nearby) dating from the 1850's by Thomas Worthington in a very derelict state with scaffolds. This was a highly regarded public baths. Also the **Eagle Pub** opposite to the baths still functioning, open from 3 pm daily.

Annette Butler (Thanks to Annette for arranging this splendid visit to unknown and fascinating territory).

The River Alt by Andrew Richardson

I suppose that most of us at one time indulge in a little research, although not necessarily about Victorian buildings, aided by all the seemingly limitless accounts of information now available with ease on the Internet. This, though, only represents what someone else has put there, it being much more fun and satisfying to get out into the real world for oneself, check the maps and talk to passers –by (dog walkers can be a mine of information!)

And so I found myself immersed (not literally) in the 16 miles of the River Alt, a river which quietly meanders through parts of Merseyside on its way to the sea at Hightown. Most locals know of this river (“an open sewer”) but very few outside United Utilities can be au fait with the entire course of this forgotten waterway.

A friend, knowing of my love for all things nerdy, had casually asked if I knew where the Alt began, so I googled it up, amazed to discover that it originated in the middle of a pleasant field in Huyton Lane, a stone’s throw from ASDA and the local shopping area. This slice of Paradise is known as Huyton Wetlands, the last remaining part of a much larger marshy area. It is said that the staff in ASDA feel their building wobble on the unstable land, if that’s true or thanks to a heavy night in one of the nearby pubs I couldn’t say!

There are a couple of seats in the field, bull-rushes sprouting from the soft ground around the lovely pond from which the stream has bubbled for 14,000 years, although I don’t know how they came upon such an exact date. As the traffic roars along Huyton Lane our little stream of crystal-clear water quietly begins its journey beneath the roadway before trickling between bushes and shopping trolleys beside a footpath before disappearing into a culvert (buried pipe) for a while. Street names such as “Marshfield Close”, house names such as “Brookside” and “Altways” perpetuate the presence of a living think just beneath our feet.

Covering the entrances to culverts are massive tubular fences which straddle the water course to prevent entry by juveniles, an ugly but vital blot on the landscape, the next one being where the stream can be seen

again, running a few feet below ground level beside a landscaped walk known as “South Alt Greenway” from where it passes beneath Liverpool Road, the main route from Liverpool to Prescot and St. Helens, a mosaic identifying its name set into the sandstone wall at this spot.

Still beautifully clear, the river emerges from below the road via an old stone tunnel to run through trees beside a road whose name has puzzled me for years – “Seth Powell Way”. Purely by chatting to folk I found that Seth was Mayor of Knowsley 1975-6 which would date this modern road beside which can be found the “Alt Park Play Area” and the “River Alt Resource Centre”.

We’ve now entered what was once known as Cantril Farm, or “Cannibal Farm” to its detractors although the modern name is Stock Bridge Village. Lo and behold, though, the now retired actual stone bridge is still there over which the farmer must have herded his animals, or “stock” with the clear Alt in which many a cow may have quenched its thirst, still passing below the sandstone arch. For a short distance beside “Waterpark Drive” and “Christ the King Centre for Learning”, the river, behind a large fence, is almost lost in the middle of dense undergrowth before disappearing into another culvert, to emerge into “Mab Lane Community Woodland” near to “Brookside”, the road made famous by Phil Redmund’s soap opera.

“Coachman’s Drive” and “Riverside” cross our river, in this very pleasant area of modern houses, just as it flows between massive railings and into the grounds of Croxteth Hall where it was straightened out by a long-gone Lord Sefton as part of his ornamental pleasure grounds. Now about five feet wide, the river passes through sylvan woodland, under “Oak Lane North” then a long way through undergrowth and behind fences towards Gill Moss.

Far from being forgotten, the Alt now takes centre stage near Stonebridge Lane where it leaves “Alt Park” to enter the 20 acres of “Alt Meadows”, Liverpool’s newest and 48th park, opened by Mayor Joe Anderson on 29/3/2015. Over two years £1.55 m was spent diverting the river from its straight and culverted course into a serpentine shape by the

“Cass Foundation” who planted 2,000 trees and 4,000 shrubs to beautify what had been a messy industrial area.

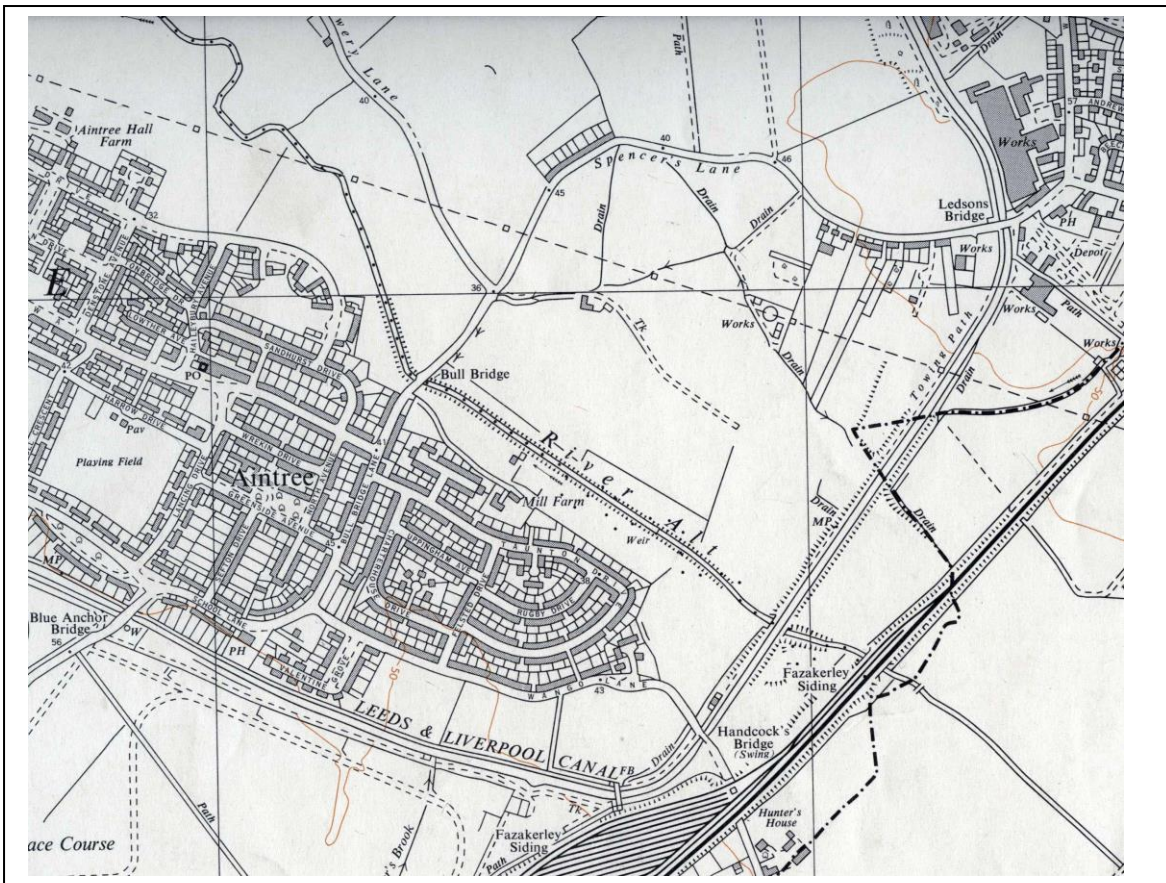
The river leaves what, hopefully, will be a future beauty spot, to run below the busy East Lancs Road, Britain’s first purpose-built inter-city highway, 29 ½ miles taking five years to build while having the unusual feature in that it actually by-passes all towns on its to Manchester with hardly a curve. It was opened by George V on 18th July 1934. The Alt emerges here from a tunnel where the only “waterfall” can be found to the original sandstone “Stone Bridge”.

Local folklore tells of the Vikings who sailed up the Alt from Hightown but although the flow of the Alt, in this area, is swelled by smaller streams such as Sugarbrook, Kirkby Brook, Fazakerley Brook and Knowsley Brook it still seems too shallow for Navigation unless the invaders walked up it.

Nevertheless, a new pub/carvery opened here on 12th October 2015 called he “Viking’s Landing”, me claiming the status of being their first paying customer, amused that the manager didn’t know the significance of his new pub’s name! Not only is the food good but the interior of this instantly-popular tavern is exceptionally novel and colourful.

The river now enters the sewage works where the flow of the Alt, now cloudy, is greatly increased with treated waste, although I saw a large heron looking for its dinner a little downstream so the water can’t be too bad here.

The river is fenced off where it skirts Fazakerley’s Field Lane housing estate (one road named “Altside Court”) but can be found again crossing Valley Road (Liverpool to Kirkby route) before bisecting the Municipal Golf Course which I explored in horizontal rain! But, if I was mad, what about the golfers, oblivious to the weather, who were happily playing their game at the same time? On the far side of the course the railway crosses the Alt on a tall bridge, then, nearby, the Leeds-Liverpool Canal also crosses the Alt on a very strong arched aqueduct before traversing fields by Bull Bridge Lane.



The river burrows beneath the M57 motorway then across fields belonging to “Carr Cottage”, the word “Carr” now beginning to crop up, the farmer telling me that it was the old word meaning “swamp”. The friendly chap told me that, when digging for foundations, he came across layers of sand and reeds, suggesting to him that this area had once been an estuary. From here most of the Alt’s course would take it (and me!) through wet, heavy ground, my being glad of my Wellington boots!

14, 000 years ago the locals would have been aghast to see Switch Island, still a nightmare to negotiate with its plethora of roads and motorways. Luckily a long-awaited Crosby by-pass had just been opened when I started my research and proved most helpful. Our river, though, slips silently between the mayhem of traffic and then, just before leaving the Maghull area, passes below a disused railway bridge, one part of the Cheshire Lines route to Southport.

The river had been below ground level as far as here, but for a few miles, was to be contained between sturdy embankments to prevent flooding. This farming area and the fairly new woodlands are also home to a valuable waterfowl and nature reserve where owls and buzzards can be seen (not by me, though!). Long ago, when winters were so cold, the Alt would freeze over in this area and ice skating was a popular hobby.

The lonely land is true “Battle of the Somme” terrain with electric pumping stations endlessly removing excess water from the fields, depositing it into the Alt which is at a higher level. There are footpaths in a few places, access to one by “Carr Side Farm” , near to Ince Woods, in which is located Ince Blundell Hall, now a convalescent home. In the 1770’s they were lucky when building the huge boundary wall, comprising astronomical numbers of bricks as they had clay to hand.

After this, access to the river is virtually impossible as it winds its way across flat land near “Car House Farm” on its way to the Formby by-pass, the original road passing the Altcar/Ince boundary, this being carved in the sandstone wall of an ancient road bridge still well used by heavy lorries.

Frustratingly the river now turns south towards the Altcar Military Rifle Range and I was unable to gain access which was annoying as there was an interesting feature on the map, marked “NTL” which crosses the river inside the forbidden area. The letters stand for “Normal Tide Limit” above which the tide has no more effect on the river so it must be a weir of sorts.

I tried all sorts of footpaths that might have offered me a glimpse of this feature from outside the big fence, which it didn’t, although I did meet some interesting walkers including a bloke with a singing dog (you couldn’t make it up!). The dog didn’t just howl but really emitted a tune when ever its owner flicked the lead!

Just past the sleepy village of Hightown the river finally enters the sea, guided for its last few hundred yards through a channel at the end of which is a beacon to warn shipping (Vikings?) to take care. This could be seen easily from the popular coastal path, from where we took the final photographs including one of me wearing a Viking helmet, complete with horns, that I’d made although I was assured that the Vikings never did actually wear horns on their helmets!

c. Andrew Richardson, 2016.