

NEWSLETTER

www.angelfire.com/AL4/westderbysoc/

Autumn 2009

50p to non-members

Lowlands Official Opening

The Society's home, Grade II-listed *Lowlands*, was officially opened on Friday 28 August 2009.

About 100 specially-invited guests filled the main hall to chat over a glass or two. There were people who covered the whole spectrum of volunteers, helpers and supporters over the 52 years since *Lowlands* was purchased by the West Derby Community Association (WDCA) from Alderman Ernest Cookson with the help of the Earl of Sefton.

Our principal guest who performed the opening was Dame Lorna Muirhead, Lord Lieutenant of Merseyside. She is pictured below making her speech before declaring *Lowlands* officially open.



Dame Lorna gave an entertaining speech which included a history of the building and the work done by volunteers to raise £1.2 million to restore and refurbish the historic building.

The event was also attended by the Lord Mayor of Liverpool Mike Storey.

The speeches were followed by refreshments and tours of the building taking in the many

interesting features of the former merchant's mansion built in 1846.

West Derby Society chairman and WDCA trustee Stephen Guy (right) is pictured with three of the original *Lowlands* volunteers.



In the centre is Henry Huckstep who was chairman of the West Derby Community Association 1957 – 1965, daughter Margaret who helped set up the famous Pillar Club and Harry Walker who was also among the original band of volunteers.



Guests are pictured listening to the speeches with the French windows and garden in the background. Some veterans recalled *Lowlands* as it was when the Association bought it in 1957. **Cont ...**

Wakey Wakey!

A number of alterations were made including the creation of the main hall by knocking three rooms together.

The building had been used by the Inland Revenue for offices for about 15 years. There were reinforced air raid shelters in the basement.

Some of the Second World War exterior installations were removed as part of the latest renovations. However, reinforced doors remain in parts of the basement.

Trustees and officials are seen on the stunning staircase which now looks as it would when the house was first built.



They are (left to right): Barbara Buchanan, Anita Oliver, Stephen Guy, Pat Hughes and WDCA chairman Pat Blair JP.

The Society's 1884 painting of the Village is in the background.

A big thank you to all those Society members who helped make this important day such a success, helping to make our guests feel at home. There has been lots of praise for the event.

West Derby Wakes were the event of the year for the inhabitants of the village and the surrounding countryside in the 18th century, **writes Alastair Caird.**

It had been celebrated for centuries and no other place in the county could boast such revelries.

Originally the Wakes were held on the anniversary of the dedication of the Ancient Chapel of St Mary the Virgin. In those early days the celebrations would have taken a different form to those of later years.

A service was held in the chapel with the altar and pulpit garlanded with leaves and flowers and rushes were scattered on the floor.

Yard

Tents were erected in the chapel yard offering a liberal supply of cakes and ale while in an adjoining field there were all kinds of games and sports.

Throughout the morning carts and horses carrying farmers, their families and farm workers thronged the lanes from Walton, Kirkby, Simonswood, Knowsley, Huyton and Liverpool.

People came to enjoy themselves and, as one historian put it: "Merriment and love-making were the features of the time".

During this period parson and clerk attended the Wakes to marry all who applied and this custom was probably also observed in West Derby.

Pagan

Gradually the religious element of the festival was forgotten and it degenerated into something like a pagan ritual. The Wakes attracted legions of hawkers, showmen and professional sportsmen. There were games of chance, prize fighting, dog fighting, hard drinking and bull baiting.

The latter was a cruel entertainment where the bull was tethered to a stake and then attacked by dogs. There was frenzied betting on the outcome of the contest.

On one occasion a group of sailors **Cont ...**

untied the bull and drove it to Liverpool where they dragged it into a theatre in Williamson Square.

The Wakes were discontinued in the 19th century and succeeded by a Club Day on the last Monday in July. About 300 members of the Tradesmen's Benevolent Club were among those taking part in sports on the Castle Field, Meadow Lane. Later the Oddfellows held a walk on the first Monday in August – a forerunner of the August Bank Holiday.

Ancestors

When studying the sports and other recreations of our ancestors it becomes clear that, although life was hard, they still had a great deal of pleasure in life.

The year would start with first footings and general merriment. In February there was Candlemas Day and customs associated with St Valentine were observed.

In the spring there was Mothering Sunday, Palm Sunday and the great festival of Easter with buns and eggs.

Pase egging was a custom practised in West Derby, Wavertree and elsewhere until about 1870. It was a play performed by a band of boys dressed up in coloured ribbons, tinsel and paper hats and armed with toy swords. The West Derby pase eggers were considered the best in south Lancashire.

Strong

Another custom earlier in the century involved strong young men performing on village greens and in front of large houses. They dressed in colourful suits, sometimes made of satin. The main character was the Black Morocco King who would fight with another called the Noble Turk.

Satan also appears and the Doctor cures all – even the dead – and they all end up happily dancing together.

May Day had many customs including the May Pole. Both Ascension Day and Oak Apple Day – celebrating Charles II – were holidays. Marriages were most popular at Whitsuntide and during June.

St Swithin was remembered in July and at the end of summer, when all was gathered in, there was the Harvest Home with its feasting and dancing.

Hunting was popular in autumn and in November the Gunpowder Plot was remembered.

Martinmas (the feast of St Martin on 11 November) reminded each generation of a saint who had been extra good to the poor. Christmas was marked with the Yule log, family gatherings, feasting and present giving.

All the bells of the parish churches rang out to close the year.

William Blundell

By the 17th century a much-noted name in south west Lancashire was Blundell. Perhaps the most distinguished gentleman of that name was William Blundell, born at Crosby Hall in 1620.

When Charles I was rallying support, William raised 100 dragoons for the Royalist cause. Married at 15, he was a prolific writer who is today remembered for his diary – a fascinating account of day-to-day life.

These diaries were published in three volumes by Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire. Squire Blundell died in 1698 and was buried in Sefton Church.

Bryan Blundell was a Liverpool sea captain who founded the Bluecoat School, paying for the Chambers in 1708. He said: "I saw children begging about the streets, their parents being so poor as not to have bread for them, which gave me great concern ..."

Coaches for hire

The first record of a Hackney-style carriage in Liverpool was in 1772 when William Griffiths advertised his coach to "stand and be ready at the Chaise and Horses" in Fenwick St every day from 10 am to 10 pm.

Rates to any part of the town were one shilling (5p) for up to three people, 1/6 (7.5p) for four people and two shillings (10p) for six. Such carriages became popular and were commonplace by around 1775. **Cont ...**

Road transport developed rapidly in the early 19th century and, by 1830, 150 stage coaches left Liverpool every day.

Horse-drawn omnibuses began working in Liverpool on 12 May 1830.

The designs for the first vehicles are not known but some second-hand vehicles were obtained from London.

The First Class passengers inside were to be allowed 18 inches and that "on no account were Second Class passengers to be allowed inside".

Ladders

The early vehicles had iron ladders which ran to an open-topped deck. These ladders were upright and no lady would be seen climbing them until the introduction of curved staircases and handrails.

During the 1830s the growth in omnibus use led to fierce competition on popular routes and a reduction in fares allowed more people to use the 'bus.

Some omnibuses were tourist attractions.

The Bath brothers operated a unique service – open horse-drawn boats mounted on wheels, carrying up to 60 passengers.

The boats were painted various colours and fitted with cushioned seats. The service only ran on Sundays, carrying passengers from the Liverpool Exchange to the Aigburth Hotel. The fare was 6d (2.5p) and they were always crowded with passengers.

Meanwhile, the gentry often rode in their private carriages such as this barouche from 1851.



The omnibus trade boomed until the tram era began in 1869 with the Liverpool Tramway Company which was taken over by the Corporation in 1897.

Liverpool first saw motor 'buses in February 1906 – a Clarkson Steamer took passengers between Castle St to the Liverpool Cycle and Motor Show at the exhibition hall in Edge Lane.

In the summer that year, well-known local motor traders L Blake & Co ran tourists around the city in an open-top Lacre Observation Car. Each tour lasted 90 minutes and ran four times a day.

Hotel

The Adelphi ran a 12-seater Rolls Royce 'bus - registration N 51 - between the hotel, railway stations and the Pier Head.

In 1909 Liverpool Corporation obtained powers to run motor buses under its General Powers Act. The council voted 32 – 26 against starting a 'bus service but on 1 January 1911 purchased the Woolton Company's business for £934 – three 'buses, one charabanc and a leased garage in Allerton Rd.

Towards the end of 1927 there began a rapid expansion of the Corporation's motor 'bus system.

Estates

The growth of housing estates on the city outskirts was taking large numbers of people beyond the tram terminuses so 'buses were needed.

The first of the new feeder services started on 28 October 1927 between Mossley Hill, Calderstones, Childwall and Wavertree Clock Tower.

The rapid development of 'bus services took a severe toll on the railways and their revenues. Railway companies were able to expand into the 'bus market with the passing of the Railways (Road Transport) Act 1928. At the time there were fears that the railway companies would set up 'bus services but this did not materialise.

The companies decided to invest only in existing businesses because of their lack of knowledge of the 'bus industry.

In January 1939, with war looming, Liverpool Corporation's general manager **Cont ...**

reported the need to expand the 'bus fleet, replacing defective single-decker six wheelers.

Two months later the Ministry of Health requested the retention of at least 20 Corporation vehicles to convert to wartime ambulances.

By the end of 1957 the entire tram network had been replaced by 'buses. The Transport Act 1968 effectively eliminated private 'bus operators and transferred passenger transport to the newly-created Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority (MPTA). The Local Government Act 1972 created the metropolitan county of Merseyside. Following the Local Government Act 1985 abolishing Merseyside County Council, a new Passenger Transport Executive (PTE) was established.

In 1988 these two authorities were merged to become Merseytravel. Today there are more than 30 'bus operators on Merseyside.

We finish with this view of Liverpool in 1650 when the castle still dominated the town.



For hundreds of years the fortress was the largest building in the area. This view shows Liverpool just after the Civil War about 50 years before the port began its spectacular growth.

Following the construction of Liverpool Castle, the smaller wooden fortress in West Derby fell into disuse. Liverpool Tower, in the centre of this view, was the town stronghold of the Earls of Derby. St Nicholas's parish church, on the left, is the only building still standing although much altered.

Didn't we have a lovely time ...

... the day we went to Beaumaris.

It was 4 July but we weren't celebrating Independence Day – we were off to the seaside for a bit of Welsh history.

With the Parr's coach expertly driven by Alix (who gave us a Health & Safety talk before we set off), we were soon crossing the Britannia Bridge and heading along the leafy road into Beaumaris.

There was a slight calamity as we were getting off the coach – the chairman broke one of the raffle prizes, a bottle of wine (which he had to replace at his own expense, of course).

Everyone had a great time looking around.

The main attraction, Beaumaris Castle is seen in this sketch by the chairman.



Some of us went around the historic prison which has not held any inmates since the 1870s. It still boasts a treadmill where felons burnt off boot leather and also surplus energy.

Others took a sail on the Menai Straits with its magnificent views including Puffin Island. We were told that the loveable little birds had returned after the huge rat population was destroyed in a conservation programme. The historic Beaumaris courthouse is a lot bigger but not as old as our own tiny Tudor treasure.

It has had famous visitors such as Charles Dickens who once attended a hearing sat on the very cramped wooden press bench fitted with an unusual cubby hole for notebooks.

Chairman's Comments

There is a General Election looming and politicians are judging almost everything they say and do in relation to votes.

Our free democracy has been fought for over the centuries and we are still struggling to ensure tyranny does not triumph.

This brings me to one of my favourite tyrants of the recent past. Despite being probably the most dangerous man in Europe 100 years ago, he was always a comic figure in Britain – Kaiser Wilhelm of Imperial Germany.

As we see the regular sad spectacle of the bodies of British soldiers being brought home from Afghanistan, it is sobering to think of the terrible losses this country bore in the First World War mainly because of the actions of this man - Kaiser Bill – and his generals. It seems almost bizarre now to think that British people sent these postcards during the carnage of the trenches.



It is a cliché to say that it is the British sense of humour that sees us through our problems but these images bear it out.

German cartoons lampooning the Allies at this time have an almost Gothic quality with their grim sarcasm. I would suggest the British ones have an element of affection towards the comic absurdity of the German Emperor.

Despots like the Kaiser, Hitler, the Tsar, Lenin, Stalin and Mugabe in our own time pay lip service to democracy. They always argue that they were voted in despite the deep flaws in the electoral systems.

It is strange how we can still laugh at the Kaiser but probably not at the other lot. He had a certain absurdity that very much appealed to the British public.



There may also have been a grudging recognition that he was the black sheep of the British royal family. Wilhelm's grandmother was Queen Victoria and it is an irony of history that she died in his arms.



All this gets me musing about how fortunate we have been with our royal family and politicians at least in the last century or two. However – using another cliché – we should not forget the lessons of history.

There have been times when despots have ruled Britain and there is always a danger that history will repeat itself. That's why it is so important to vote.

Stephen Guy



