

West Derby Society

NEWSLETTER

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History Rooms Opens

The Lord Mayor Liverpool, Councillor Hazel Williams, officially opened the *Lowlands* History Room and West Derby Museum on Sunday 26 September.

The new free attraction, which is administered by the West Derby Society, is open during *Lowlands* events and by appointment.

The Lord Mayor, accompanied by her son Michael, arrived by limousine and joined 50 invited guests for canapés and drinks in the main hall.

Declaring the Room open, the Lord Mayor said: "Congratulations to all those who have helped to make this exciting facility a reality. It will encourage people to learn about their local history."



West Derby Community Association chairman Pat Blair is pictured showing the way to our civic guests.

A Liverpool City Council grant helped furnish the Room.

The library, which is for reference only, has books of mainly local and specialist history interest. All have been donated by West Derby Society members and others. There are a number from the library of the late Frankla Corris MBE.



West Derby Society archivist and *Lowlands* volunteer James Ashton gave a tour of the resource which also features 1960s news items from the *West Derby Reporter*.

Two computers contain fascinating images of West Derby including many taken by Village postmistress Marion Fergie more than 100 years ago. There are also scans of historic documents relating to land and other subjects. The restoration and refurbishment of *Lowlands* in 2008-9 is recorded in words and pictures.

Among the books is a large bound copy of *The Times* recording national and world events in 1957, the year *Lowlands* opened as the West Derby Community Centre.

The official History Room opening was followed by the annual *Lowlands* Open Day when members of the public were taken on tours of the building and grounds.

- *Lowlands*, the Grade II-listed home of the West Derby Society and many other organisations, was built in 1846 by prominent Liverpool architect and builder Thomas Haigh as his private residence.

When Knights Were Bold

Long ago West Derby and Liverpool were in the parish of St Mary, Walton-on-the-Hill, the Mother Church of this part of Lancashire, **writes Alastair Caird**.

Liverpool was made a separate parish by Act of Parliament in 1699 and West Derby in 1844.

The Chapel of St Mary the Virgin (pictured below) existed from very early times. The first record we have relates to a brawl at Ascensiontide – the 10 days from Ascension Day to the day before Whit Sunday - in 1360.



Later, in the reign of Edward IV, the bailiff of the manor had to pay £3 6s 8d (£3.34) for repairs to the chapel after the king held his court there.

Croxteth Hall, originally called Barrets Hall, was acquired by Sir Richard Molyneux of Sefton at the time of Edward IV. The earliest part of the house, facing south, dates from Queen Elizabeth's reign. This portion is built from brick and stone, with mullioned windows and projecting bays.

Fine

The impressive west front, with its fine carvings, was built between 1702 and 1714. Further extensions were added in 1790 and 1874-7 before the final grand addition in 1902 – 4.

Sefton Hall, home of the Molyneux family for hundreds of years, was dismantled by 1720 and Croxteth Hall became their principal residence. The park between the Hall and the Village was laid out by the 3rd earl who died in 1855.

William de Molines, one of the Norman knights under William the Conqueror, stands in the 18th Order upon the roll of Battle Abbey built on the site of the Battle of Hastings when the English King Harold was killed. De Molines – an early form of the name Molyneux - was granted the manor of Sefton by Roger de Poitou, Lord of Lancaster.

In 1367 following the Battle of Navarette, Edward the legendary Prince of Wales known as the Black Prince (1330-76), created Sir William Molyneux a knight banneret.

This meant that William was able to command other knights and men-at-arms under his own banner, an honour given for valour on the battlefield.

Distinguished

Decades later Sir Richard Molyneux rendered distinguished service in the French wars. In 1446 Henry VI, the last Lancastrian king, made him chief forester of the royal forests and parks in West Derby hundred (wapentake) as well as Constable of Liverpool. Richard fell fighting under the Lancastrian banner at Bloreheath in 1459.

A later Sir William Molyneux shone at Flodden Field in 1513 when the invading Scots were defeated and James IV of Scotland killed.

Standards

William personally captured two enemy standards which were preserved for many years. A brass in Sefton Church shows him in his armour and shirt of mail.

When James I of England created the order of baronet in 1611, Sir Richard Molyneux became only the second to receive the honour.

In 1672 Lord Molyneux built a bridge across the Pool at the end of Liverpool's Lord St – then known as Lord Molyneux Place.

Charles William, son of the fourth Viscount Molyneux, became the 1st Earl of Sefton in 1771. Hugh Molyneux was the 7th and last Earl. When he died in 1972 he did not have any close blood relatives and bequeathed Croxteth Hall and much of the surrounding parkland to the people of Liverpool.

Club Moor

A document of 1577 describes an ancient bridlepath leading across Club Moor from West Derby to the burial ground at Walton. It mentions a cross or burial stone at the roadside used for prayers and a resting place for coffins.

Lark Hill was built in 1770 by Jonathan Blundell of Leeds St, Liverpool, and *Deysbrook*, West Derby – he owned Pemberton Collieries.

The Lark Hill estate was on a slightly-elevated watershed between the basins of the Rive Alt and Tue Brook. It had been purchased in 1721 by William Furnivall from Henry Mercer, one of numerous landowners in the manor of West Derby.

Furnivall's descendents sold the estate to Blundell in 1769. Richard Heywood, the banker, later acquired *Lark Hill* and the estate later passed to Liverpool Corporation.

New Hall

A noteworthy house was New Hall, probably given this name to distinguish it from nearby Walton Hall. Richard Molyneux rebuilt New Hall in 1660 as a home for himself and heiress wife Elizabeth Harrington of Huyton.

The property was also later bought by the Heywoods.

St Mary's Chapel in West Derby had much rebuilding in the 18th century. It was demolished upon completion of the present church designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott in 1856. Scott's grandson designed Liverpool Cathedral.

The elaborate monument in the centre of the Village, marking the site of the chapel, was put up by Anna Maria Heywood of Norris Green mansion.

Stalwart

A word of thanks here to all our stalwart ~~Newsletter~~ deliverers. Due to their efforts we only have to post some 22 ~~Newsletters~~, mainly to people living far from Liverpool. The postage saved by the generous people who do the deliveries is very great indeed and helps keep the yearly subscriptions to a reasonable level.

Our distributors personally deliver four ~~Newsletters~~ every year to areas fairly near where they live. Two volunteers make deliveries by car to far-flung addresses around Liverpool – we are a diverse Society with much interest coming from former West Derby residents.

Our heartfelt thanks to this small and dedicated band of helpers without whom the society would not be able to function as well as it does, if at all.

We currently have members in Chesterfield, Flintshire, Swindon, Wirral, Cambridge, Manchester and Holmes Chapel. None have forgotten their West Derby roots.

Lecture

We met after the summer break as usual at *Lowlands* in September for a lecture on West Derby's volunteer fire service only to be told that due to a mix-up the speaker was unavailable – indeed he was in New York! However, not to worry – our chairman stepped into the breach and at very short notice reprised his illustrated talk on *Local Curiosities*. This was about unusual things on Merseyside such as England's narrowest street (Stone St in Prescott). It was a great evening and all thanks to Stephen for displaying, once again, his lecturing expertise.

Armada

Cunard's magnificent liner *Queen Mary* was heavier than the total weight of the Spanish Armada. On 27 May 1936 all 80,733 tons of her steamed out of Southampton on her way to New York. The ship's attractions included three cinemas, a chapel, synagogue ... and a promenade deck complete with lampposts reserved for dogs. The poet Laurie Lee described the vessel as "elegant, romantic, almost medieval".

That August, as the ship broke the transatlantic speed record, Edward VIII sent a congratulatory telegram from the holiday yacht in the Mediterranean he was sharing with his American friend Wallis Simpson.

Below are a couple of vintage adverts from St Mary's church magazine dated February 1956 featuring various West Derby establishments.

How many of these old shops do you remember and did any of you take a copy of our own weekly newspaper, the *West Derby Reporter*?

(The Rookery (now an undertaker's) was next to the Plaza Cinema (today the Co-op supermarket). Tom Shillington was a personality and I remember the shop had a central display cabinet with diaries, fountain pens and other stationery. Tom used to be quoted quite often in the Reporter reminiscing about old West Derby. The Reporter office was in Eaton Rd and the newspaper was part of the St Helens Reporter group.

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Prout's the tailor was a popular business before the days of cheap throwaway clothes. They made bespoke suits as well as off-the-peg, as indicated here. Mr Prout was one of the original trustees who bought Lowlands . Cubbon's was part of a chain of good-quality shops with branches throughout the Liverpool area — Ed.)

Courthouse Visits

West Derby Courthouse, manned by enthusiastic society volunteers, has had another popular year of Sunday afternoon openings. The busiest was on 26 Sept when 81 people crossed the threshold including a coachload of history buffs from Ormskirk and Aughton. The Heritage Weekend period, when the Courthouse had extra publicity, also recorded above-average figures – 64 on 5 Sept and 69 the following Sunday. The Grade II*-listed Courthouse was built in 1586.

Margaret Beavan and West Derby

A recent article about the Margaret Beavan School in the *West Derby Link* brought a response from a former teacher.

She sent an item researched and penned in 1979 by the late John H Ling, who also taught at the school.

He recalls how it was built in 1885 as a private residence called *Eddesbury* (seen below in a contemporary drawing).



The house appears to have been built by a man called H Lathom, a wealthy cotton merchant with plantations in the US. It was said Lathom sought the hand of Lord Sefton's only daughter but was doubtless rebuffed because the suitor was "in trade".

Lathom's cotton empire stretched across acres of South Carolina and he also had interests in ships carrying the commodity from Charleston to Liverpool.

Lathom never moved into *Eddesbury* because he lost everything following reforms in the US cotton industry.

Instead the one and only major resident was Danson Cunningham, a leading Liverpool cotton broker pictured in a contemporary cartoon (right).

Brick

The construction of *Eddesbury* was hit by a shortage of masons who were involved in the building of the Mersey railway tunnel. The house was built partly from Ruabon brick brought to West Derby via the Llangollen Canal, the River Dee and horse and cart.

Eddesbury was staffed by local servants – senior people from houses in Upper Parliament St and five junior girls from West

Derby Orphanage.

Three sons were born to Cunningham and his wife while at *Eddesbury* – Duncan, Matthew and John.

The two elder sons were keen cricketers – Duncan went on to play for Lancashire. John was small, weak and delicate. Around 1926 the Cunninghams, hit by the Depression, moved to Tunbridge Wells, taking John with them. In 1929 the house was converted to an open air school

for delicate children from poor homes. This was around the time Margaret Beavan was Lord Mayor of Liverpool. She was a social reformer of international standing who helped bring about huge changes in children's welfare.



Margaret Beavan knew the Cunninghams – they came from similar social backgrounds – and visited them at *Eddesbury*.

For several years before the First World War Cunningham loaned his car to the Liverpool Motorists' Club to take children with disabilities on annual trips to West Kirby organised by Beavan.

She died in 1931 and *Eddesbury* was renamed the Margaret Beavan School in her honour. It was well-placed to receive children from the new housing estates in east Liverpool.

Mr and Mrs Cunningham are buried at Childwall Parish Church as is Margaret Beavan.

Her portrait was unveiled in the school entrance hall a few months after her death.

Today the former school is obscured by trees with its spectacular facade sadly hidden from view. One of West Derby's finest buildings, it awaits a

new role.

Chairman's Comments

I was looking at the holly trees at *Lowlands* the other day and noticed there were plenty o berries – this is said to forecast a hard winter. The theory is that nature is providing extra food for the birds in the cold weather.

People are predicting another Big Chill next time mainly because these things tend to come in cycles.

This has got me musing over some of the snowy West Derby scenes of yesteryear in Frankla Corris's archive.



This is *Ellerslie*, the big house that once stood at the corner of Spring Grove and Town Row. It was demolished in the late 1950s and semi-detached houses built on the site. I recall *Ellerslie* well – father always pointed it out as the home of Johnny Best, the boxing promoter and father of Beatle Pete Best.



This next view is just up the road and shows the bottom of Norris Green Rd and Marlfield Rd before the Town Row shops were built in the 1920s. West Derby Parish Church can just be seen in the distance.

The grounds of a big house called *Marlfield* can be seen over the road.



This house was demolished about the same time as *Ellerslie*. I don't remember the house – it was set back from the road – but I do recall the old outhouses. A man called Le Doux once lived at *Marlfield* – he was a keen orchid grower. This is a portrait of his wife Laura in the garden. It has been in the collection of the Walker Art Gallery for many years.

The final view shows Leyfield Rd one snowy day in the early 1950s.



This was about the time I started at Blackmoor Park School, seen on the right. At that time both infants and juniors were housed in the same building – the new infants down the road was opened about 1954.

This picture shows the houses and small holdings that once stood opposite the original school. Time marches on, as they say, and these wonderful views – part of a large cache of images to be featured in future ~~Newsletters~~ - beautifully portray our changing environment. The West Derby Society aims to protect and enhance our surroundings – old pictures such as these are inspirational.

Stephen Guy

