

West Derby Society

WEB SITE

NEWSLETTER

New Year 2024

This is a shortened version of the printed West Derby Society quarterly Newsletter sent free to all members.

Cast in Stone

They say there is always something new to discover and this certainly proved true at the recent Heritage Open Day in Croxteth Hall.



These two grotesque figures were pointed out in separate locations on the outer walls.

The one on the left adorns the Queen Anne wing so is probably the older.



The other (*right*) is on the Edwardian wing.

Both depict a man in 18th century costume carrying a tankard.

Research into their origins is ongoing. They remain a mystery but may refer to a real incident or a Molyneux family joke.

Stephen Guy, West Derby Society (WDS) chairman, said: "I have visited the Hall many times but have never noticed these figures. They are high up on the building and not

easily seen.

"The style of the later figure is similar to work by Bebington stonemason Thomas Francis (*left*) but there the similarity ends.

"The Hall figures may remain unexplained as no family members survive."

Local Government 70s Shake Up

A wide reorganisation of local authorities in England was carried out by the Local Government Act 1972, **writes Alastair Caird.**

The act was one of the most significant pieces of legislation to be passed by the 1970 – 74 Edward Heath government.

It abolished the old county councils and county boroughs, replacing them with new metropolitan counties and metropolitan districts. The legislation was designed to create a more efficient and effective system of local government.

The formation of Sefton was a controversial decision.

A list of suggested names was submitted to a competition held by local newspapers.

This resulted in the name Sefton coming into being, as the borough remains today.

Council records from the time provide an interesting insight into how the borough got its name.

Borough of Crosby council minutes of the parliamentary committee, from 6 September 1972, state that the provisional joint committee had recommended that each constituent authority of District 11A (the newly designated borough) should recommend a name for the new district.

While the borough of Crosby recommended the now familiar name of **Sefton**, some suggestions by other authorities are less familiar - including the almost futuristic sounding **Westport** suggested by Bootle and the river-related **Altborough** suggested by Formby.

Southport had the least original suggestion of **Southport (or S.W. Lancs)** and Litherland had yet to make a suggestion.

On 7 March 1973 the parliamentary committee reported that the secretary of state for the environment had made an order under which the name of Metropolitan District 11A would be **Sefton**.

The name Sefton (after the ancient village of Sefton, near Maghull) acknowledged the area's strong links with the Earls of Sefton and also the former Sefton rural district council (covering some of the local villages that existed from 1894 to 1932).

The Molyneux family settled in Sefton, living in a hall near the present day St Helen's Church. The family were descendants of the knight William de Molineux who came over during the Norman Conquests from a town called Molineaux, in Normandy. They owned most of the Sefton area but over the years were also granted land in Liverpool. Their family crest, the Cross Moline, is still used by Sefton Council and Croxteth Country Park.

The area became a major centre of industry and commerce.

The Mersey Docks & Harbour Board was established in 1858 which played a major role in the development of the area, Bootle later became an important port. The Liverpool & Manchester Railway was opened in 1830 making the area more accessible to people from all over the country.



Thomas Brassey deserves to be as well-known as many of his Victorian contemporaries. By the time of his death in 1870 he had constructed one third of the Britain's railways and one in 20 miles of the railway network throughout the world.

Brassey has always had his admirers and there are several biographies about his life and work. In 2005, the bicentenary of his birth near Chester, various events were organised both locally and nationally.

These led to an ad hoc group of enthusiasts who called themselves the Thomas Brassey Society. An early aspiration of this group was to erect a statue of Brassey at Chester railway station which he built in 1847/48.

Why Buy A Yeoman's House? **(Concluded from last issue)**

The late James Charleston continues his fascinating account of how he began to restore West Derby Village's Grade II-listed landmark.

Another hurdle I had to overcome was that after having stripped the render off the walls, thereby exposing several unknown architectural features, I could not find a type of modern render that would stick to the perished sandstone interior walls.

Mud

There is no cement mortar in Yeoman's House. It is basically built with mud holding the building stones in place. When I tried to apply modern renders to the walls I found that they covered the walls but would only stick to the outer layer of mud infill or perished sandstone and then fall off under their own weight.

I stripped what looked like dirt and straw off them when I did the original strip-out so it was back to the library to find out about traditional renders.

I found several recipes for daub which were all similar but some used more of this or more of that. All consisted of soil, sand, cow muck and straw. I experimented with the various formulas and found that all would stick to the walls and were very difficult to remove. I chose the formula that was the most difficult to remove and decided on that.

Now I needed a finish plaster and opted to use traditional slaked lime and sand.

I found that the National Trust was restoring Chirk Castle in Wales and had made and maintained lime pits on the premises, so I went there and asked them if I could buy some of their lime.

They kindly agreed when I told them the purpose I wanted to use it for. I made the lime plaster and found it went over and adhered to my render well. I was on my way.

But I found it difficult to find a plasterer who would use my new-found renders. They all thought I was simple.

I did manage to find a person working as an instructor at a TOPS course who took up the challenge. I think by the end of the project he was a believer in the traditional tenders. Almost every job in the ancient part of Yeoman's House was a challenge.

No builder could have ever made money restoring the house so no builder would have ever tried.

The features of the ancient house would have been lost. The Grade II listing does not cover the fabric of the building, only its appearance and there are several ways to achieve the same appearance. Everything to do with the restoration of Yeoman's House was carried out using traditional materials constructed with traditional methods.

Traffic

Baring vibration from traffic and pollution from industry the house should last another few hundred years. I wanted to increase the living space of the building so applied and was granted building permission for an extension. This was new-build so I now came under the jurisdiction of the building inspectors. For this I decided to get a builder who knew the modern building codes. I chose Keith Jones' Core Saw Contractors. Keith was instrumental in advising me all along my path with the ancient house so knew the levels I was willing to go for authenticity. Even though the extension build was modern we still held strict adherence to the old traditional building methods. But I had no end of new problems trying to build the new part the same as the old because the internal carpentry is all oak and there are no building codes that cover oak. Building inspectors do not like that.

Original

I reasoned that if the original building had certain size tie beams and floor joists, and that the new extension was only half the span of the old - the old had been there for almost 500 years without incident – so if I used the same size beams in the new as were used in the old, then that must surely be good enough. How wrong that thinking was.

I needed to give my oak to a structural engineer for structural calculation and take more sections to Warrington Fire Research to produce charring rates and various other tests that were needed before I was able to use the oak as a qualified building material.

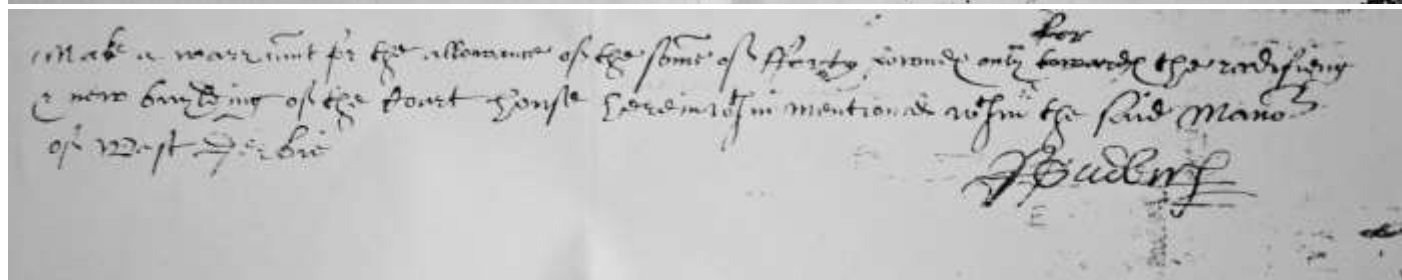
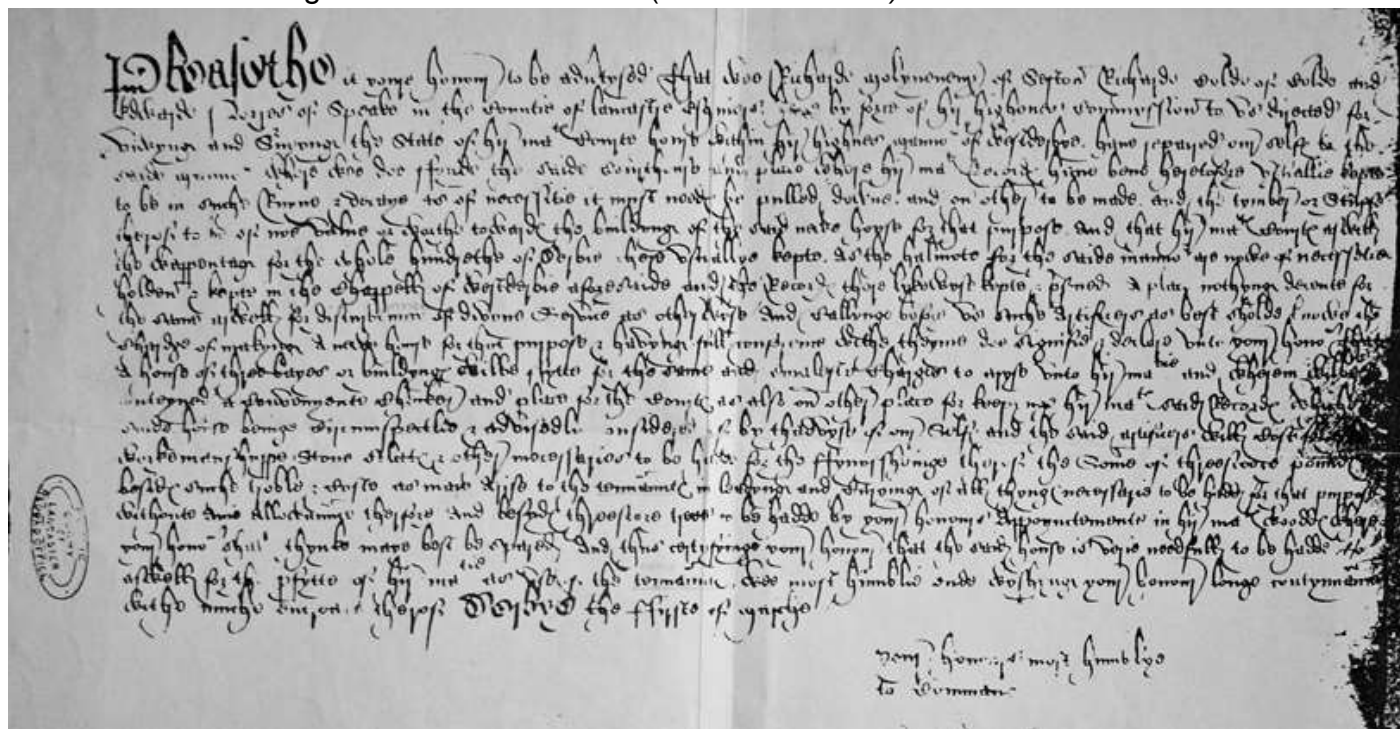


I would like to thank all of the people who helped me along the way with this project and in particular my builder Keith Jones for going along with my seemingly inane requests with building methods, my stone masons Brian and Neil Banner from Brian Banner and Sons Stonemasons, Little Crosby, for their excellent work with the stone restoration and my neighbour Bernie Flaherty from Village Garage for the innumerable problems he had encountered as part of the restoration.

Documents Prove Courthouse Building Date

Tudor documents held in the Public Record Office prove the Grade II*-listed West Derby Courthouse was built about 1586.

The West Derby Society (WDS) – joint custodians of the unique building with Liverpool City Council – has now digitalised the documents (*illustrated below*) for the first time.



Public Record Office Ref: DL44/369 PFN/1552

The historic documents were identified and transcribed by the Society's archivist Frankla Corris (1917 – 2010) who was awarded the MBE for services to West Derby's heritage.

Stephen Guy, WDS chairman, said: "Frankla was determined to discover when the courthouse was built.

"Reference books and other sources say the Courthouse dates from 1662 but no source has ever been discovered for this assertion.

"Frankla's research revealed that Elizabeth I authorised the rebuilding after three members of the Liverpool gentry petitioned her in 1586."

The three were Sir Richard Molyneux of Sefton (1560 - 1622), Richard Bold of Bold (died 1602) and Edward Norris of Speke (1539 – 1606).

They wrote to the monarch on 1 March 1586 requesting to rebuild the courthouse for £60. They also wanted 60 trees from the royal forest.

The petitioners said the old courthouse was in a state of "ruin and decay". Manor courts were held in the adjacent chapel, disturbing services. The court records were also kept at the chapel.

The Queen replied months later ordering the building to be surveyed and reports prepared.

Eventually she granted a reduced budget of £40 for the redesign and rebuilding of the courthouse. West Derby Courthouse housed the manor court until its final sitting in 1910. The Molyneux family of nearby Croxteth Hall were hereditary stewards for centuries.

Most of the work of the court related to the administration of the Molyneux estates. Britain's only freestanding post medieval courthouse, it was saved from demolition but rarely opened to the public until a £110,000 refurbishment in 2005. It was officially opened by the Lord Mayor of Liverpool the following year.



Frankla (*above left*) is seen in Tudor costume at the official Courthouse opening.

Elizabeth I's Reply and Authorisation (Modern Spelling)

Elizabeth by the grace of God Queen of England France and Ireland Defender of the Faith etc. To our trusted and well beloved Richard Molyneux Richard Bold of Bold and Edward Norris Esquire and to every of them greeting.

Whereas we are credibly informed that our Court house at West Derby in our County of Lancs is very ruinous and in great decay and that the same is like to fall down which in no wise we can spare as well for the usual keeping of our Courts within our Halmote of West Derby aforesaid as for the preservation of such of our records as do remain touching the same.

We therefore considering the premises and minding either the part repair of the same or the new making and building of a new sufficient place for that purpose and trusting in your wisdoms and discretions will and require you 3 or 2 of you at the least at time convenient by you to be limited and appointed to repair your selves to our said Court at West Derby in our said County of Lancs. Then and there calling before you by virtue hereof all such persons and such expert artificers and workmen as you will think meet thoroughly to view and survey the state of our said Court house whether the same of necessity be pulled down or not.

And if it be so ruinous and decayed that the same cannot be repaired but be pulled down then our will and pleasure is that you consider what the charges will amount unto to rectify and new build the same again.

And also what number of Timber trees will suffice for the new building thereof.

And further to enquire of all and singular the premises and the circumstances thereof as well by which other perambulations examinations and by all other ways and means as to your wisdoms and discretions for our best service shall seem best by your writings enclosed under your seals with theirs ourselves to certify our Chancellor and Committee of Duchy of Lancs in our Duchy

chamber at our Palace at Westminster of the 19th day of May next coming not failing hereof as we trust you.

Given at our said Palace under the seal of our said Duchy the 20th day of February in the 27th year of our reign.

WRITTEN OF THE BACK OF THE ABOVE DOCUMENT

Make a warrant for the allowance of the sum of forty pounds only for the redesigning and new building of the Court House herewithin mentioned within the said manor of West Derby.

Chairman's Comments

I took a stroll around our historic West Derby Castle site and noted the improvements that have been carried out.



As can be seen (*left and below*), paths have been resurfaced and the area generally tidied up. The artist's impression (*above inset*) gives some idea of what the small castle looked like. The mainly wooden structure was built some time before 1100. The castle stood on a mound or *motte* while the outer walls, or bailey, enclosed roughly the area of the existing open space.



Border Improvements and Plant Tubs (*inset*)

This pleasant area has plenty of potential beyond acting as a park.

It needs to be, at the very least, interpreted with a vandal-proof board or sign describing the significance of the site. Perhaps this is something WDS could facilitate if there was enough public support.

When I worked in Manchester, I admired the reconstructed Roman fort at Castlefield.

I'm not suggesting similar here but there is scope for the castle mound to be recreated and the bailey to be marked out by stones or a low wall.

This could then turn an empty space into an historic amenity.

Stephen Guy