

West Derby Society

NEWSLETTER

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Spring 2010

Big History Hit

The West Derby Society (WDS) had a stand at the Big History Show in St George's Hall for the first time.

More than 5,000 people enjoyed around 70 stands on Saturday and Sunday 20 /21 March 2010. This was double the numbers predicted by organisers.

WDS had a constant stream of visitors asking a barrage of questions relating to our historic area. Many of the queries were linked to family tree research and there were quite a few evocative memories of *Lowlands* and the Pillar Club.

We brought files from the West Derby Museum at *Lowlands* and some of the items on display at the West Derby Courthouse. Among the most popular were articles from the *West Derby Reporter* in the period 1959 – 65 (when the paper closed).

Talk

Your chairman was among several speakers over the weekend. He gave a talk about West Derby in one of the former Victorian courts and recalled last being there when he reported a court case about 30 years ago for the Press Association.

Other local history groups at the event included enthusiasts from Wavertree, Gateacre, Belle Vale, Walton and Ormskirk.

The Big History Show, held every two years, is organised by Liverpool City Council and Radio Merseyside. The Lord Mayor attended and some of the popular local radio presenters recorded interviews

Thanks to all those who helped out including James Ashton, Stephanie Grogan, Pam and Bill Rayner, Eric Preston and Pam Aindow.

WDS Joins Civic Voice

Society members voted overwhelmingly at their March meeting to become founder members of the new national organisation Civic Voice, replacing the defunct Civic Trust.

As the welcoming letter says: *You have joined the country's most important network working to make the places where everyone lives more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive. Civic Voice speaks up for local communities and civic societies across England. We promote civic pride and we talk civic sense.*

Civic Voice is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee.

Help

WDS was registered with the Civic Trust for many years before its collapse in April 2009. Civic Voice now fills the vacuum and your society's membership number is CIV0075.

The website is www.civicvoice.org.uk

Civic Voice, which has a Liverpool office in Wood Street, is being officially launched nationally in April and the first AGM is planned for autumn this year.

Among the benefits to WDS are: regular newsletters and updates, free legal advice, banking, insurance and health benefits.

Civic Voice has already launched its first national campaign called Street Pride in a bid to rid Britain's streets of unnecessary clutter. Civic Voice is building up a national street clutter database. See www.streetpride.org.uk

This is the type of national campaign that WDS can enhance while Civic Voice can support our endeavours. We are members of a young organisation with lots of fresh ideas that can reinvigorate the civic movement.

Ghost Musters

Since being given a tour many years ago of the old cottage at the junction of Leyfield and Alvanley Roads, my latent interest in ghosts has been reawakened, *writes Alastair Caird.*

It was a warm day but inside I was permanently frozen – it was as though a spirit was accompanying me. No-one else felt it and I was not warm again until after being outside some considerable time.

It is a universally-acknowledged truth that that every self-respecting country house is in need of a ghost. Sceptic and believer are both in agreement on this point.

History

Do these familiar spectres have a history? Did our Tudor forebears, who supposedly haunt so many homes today, expect as living people to encounter the spirits of their distant ancestors? When the Victorians, for example, encountered the supernatural did they see ghosts that they recognised?

The word *ghost* is as old as the English language itself. It distantly derives from a group of words in West German speech variously meaning to tear, terrify or wound as well as anger, fury and rage. In Anglo Saxon and Old English it was commonly rendered as *gast* or *gaeest*, words that could be used to refer in various senses to a soul or spirit. In Middle English its meaning was expanded to refer to the manifestation of one in the living world.

Word

Our modern spelling of the word with an *h* is a legacy of the 15th century printer Caxton, who was probably influenced by the Flemish *gheest*.

In the Middle Ages the doctrine of Purgatory, a celestial zone where the dead atone for their sins through suffering before passing on to Heaven, helped to account for the appearance of the dead in the living world. Ghosts were generally understood to be souls from Purgatory appearing in order to resolve the effects of some past action.

Alternatively, spirits might rise to warn the living of their fate. Such is the case with the 13th century literary tale of the three dead kings who confront three living counterparts and warn them of the dangers of luxury and vice. They offer the stark reminder: "We were as you are and you will be what we have become".

Terrifying

On both counts, although they might be terrifying to see, medieval ghosts were essentially benign.

Stories about them are common in written sources and are thought to have been popular points of reference in sermons.

Among the most curious compilations of such stories was written in the early 15th century by an anonymous Cistercian monk at Byland Abbey in Yorkshire.

They fill the end pages of an earlier manuscript and were appropriately transcribed in 1922 by ghost story writer M R James. The monk's 12 stories are all set in the abbey and concern specific individuals, although some names are tactfully withheld. One is dated to the reign of Richard II who died in 1399.

Behaviour

Some well-established themes of ghostly behaviour are apparent in these accounts – for example, the need to conjure up a ghost to let it speak. Other features may seem odd to a modern audience. Ghosts are reported to make physical contact with the living and can take many forms such as birds, animals and even inanimate objects that spin or burn. They are not confined to buildings although they sometimes act in relation to them.

There is the case of Robert, son of Robert of Boltby, who was buried in Kilburn churchyard. His ghost walked at night, pursued by the village dogs, and often stood at the doors and windows of houses. Eventually some men in the village successfully wrestled the ghost to the ground and fetched the parish priest. He called on the ghost to speak, then acted as confessor for its sins before the phantom disappeared. At the Reformation the condemnation of Purgatory by Protestant reformers demanded a new explanation for ghosts. If the dead passed straight to Heaven or Hell, what business did they have with the living and their world?

Increasingly they were viewed as manifestations of evil and became associated with witchcraft and sorcery.

Human

Attempts to use ghosts for human purposes are occasionally documented in this period. James I in his work *Daemonology* essentially saw ghosts as malign, although he cautiously acknowledged that in rare cases a ghost could be natural. The growing ambivalence towards ghosts is attested to in Shakespeare's play. When Hamlet encounters his father's spirit on the battlements of Elsinore, his first response is to question its real identity as an evil or natural apparition.

In many 17th century publications on the supernatural and witchcraft, writers began exhaustively and enthusiastically to categorise spirits and their intentions. One repeated curiosity of house hauntings in this period is the animation of physical materials.

Death

In 1609 the death of the Mayor of Rye was accompanied by a series of bizarre apparitions recorded in a surviving deposition. One witness, a George Taylor, described a complex shadowy scene in a window. It included a very ancient, grave man sitting in a chair with a book along with images of men and women and several death's heads.

In *A History of Spirits* by John Bowman (1705) he tells of a London house falling in 1649 under the spell of a conjuror. It was visited by evil princes who created images in the glass and ceilings. In addition, a globe appeared on the bricks of the chimney stack with a coach and four horses, passengers and a footman – all in motion. Another common report was of house ghosts appearing in the likenesses of recently-deceased individuals. For example, in September 1652 Canterbury physician William Jacob lost a cousin who he was treating for gangrene.

Jacob was later woken in his bed by the ghost of the deceased when it laid a cold hand on his face. In some cases ghosts may appear at the moment of death to unwitting friends or family.

Sussex MP John Butler died while travelling to London in 1766. His ghost directed family members, still unaware of his death, to the will he had hidden at home.

Leaving the realm of the paranormal, we end with this charming view of West Derby Village in May 1939 with two trams near the terminus.



Annual General meeting

The meeting began at 7.40 pm on Wednesday 20 January 2010 at *Lowlands*.

Apologies: Stan and Rita Guy.

Minutes of the AGM held on 21 January 2009 were read.

Matters arising from the minutes: None.

Chairman's report by Stephen Guy:

It seems a very long time ago now, but members will recall that our 2009 Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held at St James's Church because the renovation work was still continuing at *Lowlands*.

We returned to *Lowlands* for our April meeting and Moira Lindsey's interesting talk about the new Victoria Museum at Liverpool University. I can remember that night when Society members looked wide-eyed at the stunning changes to *Lowlands* with the particularly impressive entrance hall. As a member of the *Lowlands* Renewal Project team, this was one of those occasions which helped make all the effort worthwhile. In August we hung the Society's impressive oil painting of West Derby Village, done by Liverpool artist Hugh

Magenis in 1884, over the *Lowlands* staircase. I hope we all agree that it fits in well and is a great Society asset thanks to the generosity of the Little Crosby Museum.

Two thousand and nine was a memorable year for the Society. Our membership numbers remained buoyant and we continue to recruit new members. We had some excellent speakers – I particularly enjoyed, as did many members, the visit by Shaun Rothwell with his talk about Merseyside Police. I am sure you will agree that all the speakers were of a very high standard.

I must acknowledge all those members who volunteered to help out at the Sunday openings of the Courthouse. Thanks to you and other well-wishers we were able to make this popular historic monument available to visitors. Thanks also to those who helped at *Lowlands* events.

Our outings went smoothly - I very much enjoy organising these trips and once again I take my hat off to Parr's Coaches for their excellent service.

The attraction of the evening mystery tour is still strong and this one perhaps confused you more than earlier ones. We doubled back on ourselves and while we seemed to be heading for Southport, we ended up in West Kirby. However, there is always a slight predictability about these tours – we always end up back at West Derby.

The day trip to Beaumaris was memorable for me because I broke one of the prizes for the raffle – a bottle of wine. Luckily these days you can buy alcohol in Wales so I was able to replace it. I think this was one of the most scenic day trips we have been on – the views across the Menai Straits were awe-inspiring.

So we look forward to 2010 and once again I wish to thank you all for your support during another great year. My thanks also go to Stephanie, Alastair, Andy and the rest of the committee.

Treasurer's Report

Incoming	£
Subscriptions	850.00
Miscellaneous	49.40
Donations	26.50
TOTAL	925.90

Outgoing

Hire of hall	180.00
Speakers	80.00
Print / Post / Stationery	140.85
Miscellaneous	102.57
Donations	111.00

TOTAL	614.42
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WDS has had another good year financially. A few speakers did not charge, which has helped, and the sales of the magazines and books were up again – thank you everyone.

In February I transferred £481.47 from the community account into the Alliance and Leicester (A & L) to make it £2,000 in total. We made £6.52 interest which I thought

was awful. There is no point changing our savings account as it is the same in all banks with this current credit crunch we are all experiencing.

The coach trips were as follows: evening trip cost £285 and the day trip £365 which gave us a loss of £94 but we had a raffle which raised £90 and a donation of £1.

Balance for community chest £ 924.36

Balance for A & L £ 2,006.52

TOTAL £2,930.88

Stephanie Grogan

Hon Treasurer

2010 Outings

This year the evening mystery tour leaves West Derby Village at 6.30 pm on Wednesday 16 June. We'll be back at the Village around 10 pm.

The day trip to Cartmel and Grange-over-Sands departs from West Derby Village 9 am on Saturday 3 July - back at the Village about 6.30 pm.

Places for both trips are going fast – please pay at April or May meetings or ring 0151 228 8717.

Lowlands 2010 Events

A full programme of exciting West Derby Community Association events takes place at *Lowlands* this year.

There is a new **St George's Day** celebration at 7.30 pm on Friday 23 April including a hot pot supper.

The popular **quiz** returns at 7.30 pm on Friday 7 May.

Summer brings the **garden fete** celebrated in the spacious *Lowlands* grounds between 11 am and 3 pm on Saturday 26 June.

There are opportunities to tour this historic Grade II-listed former merchant's mansion at the **Open Day** between 1 pm and 4 pm on Sunday 26 September.

Children and adults have fun at the scary **Hallowe'en Night** from 6 pm on Saturday 30 October.

Finally, the **Christmas Fair** is between 11 am and 3 pm on Saturday 4 December.

Other attractions ...

Lowlands Cinema is held at 1 pm on the first Wednesday of the month. Admission is just £3 including an ice cream.

The Network Theatre Company is staging two afternoon performances of **A Midsummer Night's Dream** over a July weekend. Players will use the garden and house as backdrops for this *alfresco* performance.

You can pay at the door for all these events. More details from the Lowlands web site www.lowlands.org.uk or by calling 0151 226 5352. Lowlands, 13 Haymans Green, West Derby, Liverpool L12 7JG.



Night image of *Lowlands* by David Lydiate 2010

Cartmel Links

WDS has contacted the Cartmel Peninsula Local History Society following the donation of 156 Edwardian glass plates taken by West Derby village postmistress Marion Fergie.

Miss Fergie took her camera on holiday to Cartmel and photographed local people and views.

The pictures are important because they show, for example, everyday working clothes in the rural community. It is hoped some of the personalities in the studies can be identified as part of Cartmel's Village Project.

Here are some more previously unseen images from the WDS collection, all probably taken in The Barracks, a group of small houses that once stood behind the West Derby Courthouse.





Chairman's Comments

West Derby was once criss-crossed by many footpaths but most have long since been obliterated by development over the years.

Among the survivors that I walk along regularly are the track that runs between Sandfield School and Queens Drive and the Cinder Path running from Cardinal Heenan High to East Prescott Rd.

Three others I remember closing more than 40 years ago. One was alongside the railway at West Derby Station which shut when passenger services were withdrawn. Another further south along the line between Central Drive and Alder Rd closed around 1966 following an arson attack on a nearby house. I noticed the other day that the path is still there behind the walled-up entrance – overgrown with trees and saplings.

Stile

The same is true of Blessig's Stile, between Eaton and Leyfield Roads, named after Philip Blessig who lived at Blackmoor. The stile, with its lodge opposite Thornhead Lane, was once a drive leading to his mansion.

Blessig's Stile, according to the *West Derby Reporter*, was closed on the orders of Liverpool City Magistrates in 1965 following a criminal attack on a young woman. The path is now impassable because parts have been incorporated into adjacent gardens although the Leyfield end is largely unchanged. .

The path over the road down Thornhead Lane and alongside West Derby Golf Course is still open but sadly neglected.

Shortly after writing about it in the New Year ~~Newsletter~~ *Newsletter* I was dismayed to hear that an action group of local residents and others are pressing to have this ancient right of way closed.

This path has been in use since time immemorial. In Victorian times my grandfather walked along it and in the 1920s my father collected butterflies there.

In the 1960s there were cuckoos. I still use it regularly as do many others.

The 1906 map below shows its route (arrows) passing across open land as it does today.



I sympathise with people living near this path and the anti-social behaviour they suffer from certain elements using the path. I have contacted the action group but they have rejected suggestions for the future of the path.

I believe that with proper management the situation for local residents will improve. Bushes need to be grubbed up to take away possible hiding places (this has already been done at the top of Thornhead Lane).

Gates and squeezer stiles similar to those used on the old railway line should be installed to prevent motor cycles and quad bikes using the path.

Blessig's Stile and the Sandfield Park paths were closed for good reasons. However, the Thornhead footpath is different. It gives healthy access to the countryside and open land, an important part of the West Derby Society's terms of reference. At a time when obesity and poor health are rising at an alarming rate, we need all possible areas to get healthy exercise away from traffic and pollution.

Stephen Guy