

West Derby Society

NEWSLETTER

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Autumn 2011

Village Taskforce

Plans are being drawn up for managing and improving West Derby Village.

West Derby MP Stephen Twigg set up and chaired the first Village Taskforce meeting at the Millennium Centre on 26 August.

Among invited participants are the West Derby Society (WDS), our sister organisation the West Derby Village Residents and Business Association, Croxteth Hall and Country Park, local councillors and church representatives.

Case

WDS has made the case for many years that the Village, one of the most picturesque city villages in Britain, should have more resources and investment.



It was stressed that any plans for the Village must be long-term because of current financial constraints. Residents and businesses will continue to be consulted on any proposals.

Items discussed included:

- Traffic calming including one-way traffic passing on either side of the monument.
- A car park on the waste land behind the war memorial.
- Greater protection for the Courthouse including possible railings to keep people clear of vulnerable stone.

There have been many plans for the Village over the years including a by-pass that was abandoned in the 1930s as being too intrusive.

However, WDS always welcomes moves to improve our environment as well as attracting visitors and creating jobs.

In the Frame

If you live in a conservation area, such as West Derby Village, you are probably aware of the importance of traditional timber-framed windows and doors in maintaining the appearance and historical interest of an area, **writes Alastair Caird.**

Timber windows and doors also have significant environmental benefits in comparison with their UPVC (plastic) equivalents.

When in use, the energy efficiency of plastic windows is fairly comparable with timber but the manufacture and disposal of UPVC is a different story.

Energy

The manufacture of plastic windows is an energy-intensive process. The embodied energy within the product is so high that the heat energy saved through installing the window frame will never pay back the energy used to produce it.

UPVC production also generates chemical by-products that are a hazard to health and it's very difficult to recycle the windows at the end of their lives.

The durability of timber windows also provides environmental benefits in that it is very difficult to repair plastic windows, so damage usually results in the window having to be replaced. A well-designed and maintained timber window will probably outlast a UPVC window of comparable quality. Timber is a sustainable resource, provided it is Forest Stewardship Council certified. It has very low embodied energy that can be recovered through efficiency savings within a year of the windows being fitted. Even when preservative treatments, paints or stains are used the environmental impact can be minimised by using water or plant-based products instead of solvent-based synthetic alternatives.

MOTHER SHIPTON

I am recommending a day out for all WDS members to treat themselves. Although Mother Shipton (circa 1488 - 1561) has nothing directly to do with West Derby, her prophecies could affect everyone. I have visited the cave where she used to live – it's on the A59 Liverpool to York road at Knaresborough and is an interesting day out.

Her prophecies are quite chilling considering when she lived. Mother Shipton even predicted that iron ships would float on water at a time when the Wooden Walls of England were renowned.

This is what she had to say:

Over a wild and stormy sea shall a Noble sail, who to find will not fail. A new & fair countree, from hence he shall bring a herb and a root that all men shall suit and please both ploughman and king and let them take no more than measure, but both shall have the even pleasure. In the belly and the brain carriages without horses shall go and accidents fill the world with woe. Primrose Hill in London shall be and in its centre a Bishop's See. Around the world thoughts shall fly in the twinkling of an eye. Waters shall yet more wonders do, how strange yet shall be true. The world upside down shall be, and gold found at the root of tree. Through hills men shall ride, and no horse or ass by their side. Under water men shall walk, ride, shall sleep and talk. In the air men shall be see, in white and in black and in green. A great man shall come and go. Three times shall lovely France be led to play a bloody dance. Before her people shall be free, three tyrant rulers shall she see, three times the people's hope is gone, three rulers in succession see, each springing from different dynasty. Then shall the worser fight be done, England and France shall be as one. The British Olive next shall twine in marriage with the German vine. Men shall walk over rivers and under rivers. Iron in the water shall float as easy as a wooden boat. Gold shall be found and found in a land that's not now known. Fire and water shall more wonders do, England shall at last admit a Jew. The Jew that was held in scorn shall of a Christian be born and born. A house of glass shall come to pass, in England, but alas! War will follow with the work in the land of the pagan and the Turk. And state and state in fierce strife will seek each other's life. But when the north shall divide the south an eagle shall build in the lion's mouth. Taxes for blood and war will come to every door. All England's sons that plough the land, shall be seen book in hand. Learning all shall ebb and flow, the

poor shall most learning know. Waters shall flow where corn shall grow, corn shall grow where waters doth flow. Houses shall appear in the vales below, and covered by hail and snow. The world shall end when the High Bridge is thrice fallen.

Among other alleged true predictions in the above are: Sir Francis Drake's discovery of tobacco (hated by James I) and potatoes, railways, cars, submarines, the Australian gold rush, the French Revolution, Napoleon, Queen Victoria's grandson as German Kaiser, aircraft, Disraeli as Prime Minister, the Crystal Palace, The American War of Independence, income tax, Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions, modern reservoirs, urban sprawl and the Internet.

See if you can spot those yet to happen.

MUSEUM OF LIVERPOOL

In August, encouraged by our chairman, I visited the new Museum of Liverpool at the Pier Head. I picked the wrong time as it was full of kids running, screaming and shouting as kids do ie enjoying themselves! As its name suggests, the museum is very much about Liverpool – no mummies etc here.

A section yet to be opened will feature the docks and Overhead Railway, both of great interest to me, and I look to the future with great interest.

I am revisiting when the summer is over – it was far too crowded to fully appreciate its many offerings. The feature which most interested me was a TV screen high on a wall where an area of the city centre – Derby Square - is seen as it is today. The view gradually faded to reveal how it was after being bombed in the Second World War. It was interesting to see the area before and after.

The city centre in general was very crowded indeed as was the Pier Head. The ferry was teeming along with the pleasant, newly-opened, Riverside Walk running past the old docks.

The whole area is well worth a visit, with the Museum of Liverpool as a focal point, but I recommend you visit outside the school holidays when it may be a little quieter. Incidentally I found the museum café to be efficient, good quality and good value.

Demolition

Uplands, a large villa next to Holly Lodge school, is scheduled for demolition this January. Until recently it was used as a nursery and education unit. The house, which is not listed, is atmospheric but not of high standard. WDS will be watching any development plans for the site, especially if they affect the many large protected trees dotted around the grounds, particularly adjacent to Queens Drive.

Ship to Shore

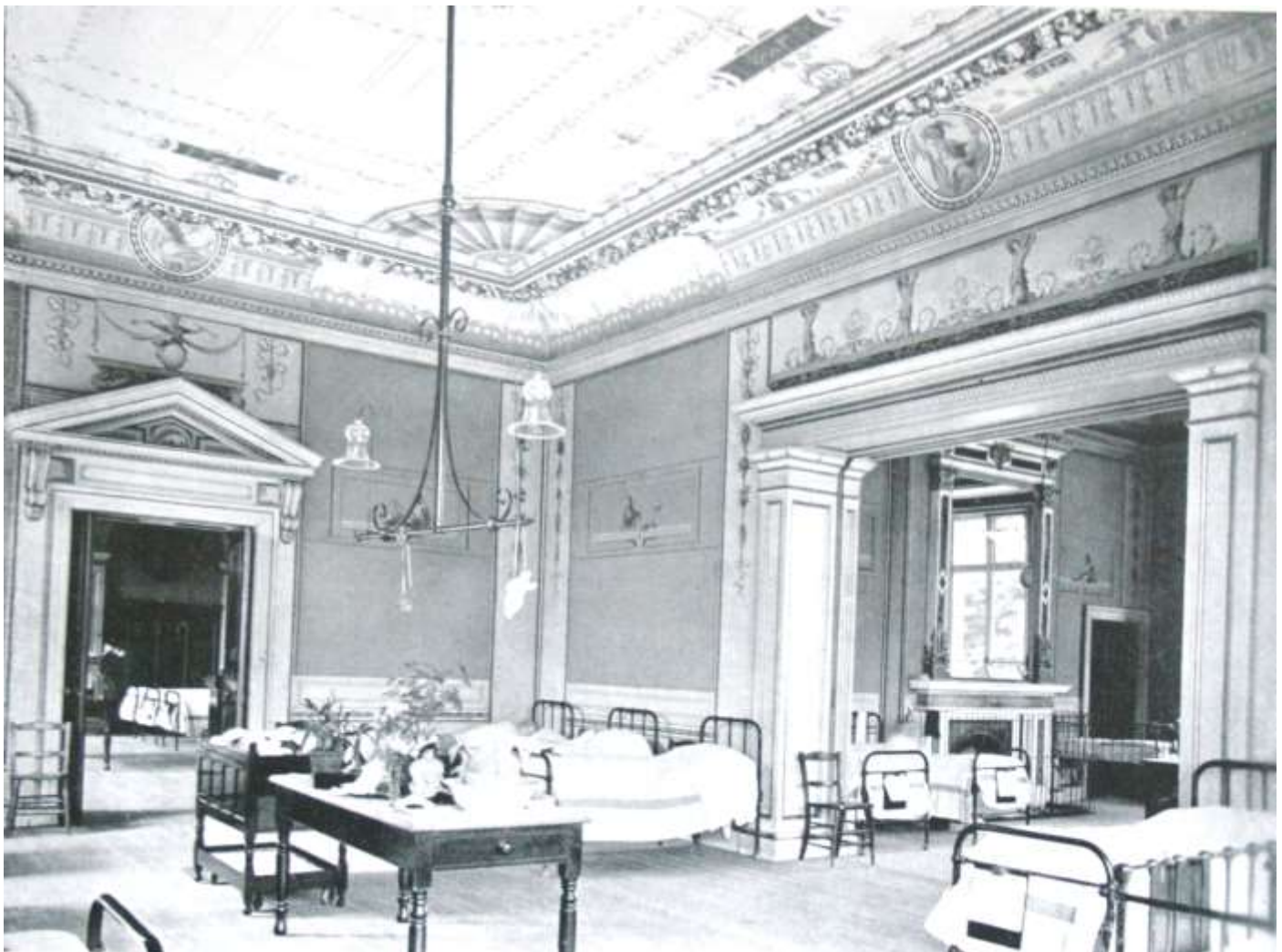
Talented WDS member Lol Buchanan has made two fascinating items that can be seen in the History Room and West Derby Museum at *Lowlands*.



One is this stunning ship-in-a-bottle that former marine engineer Lol made from scratch. Fittingly it depicts one of the earliest Harrison Line ships, the *West Derby*. The sailing ship is depicted moving well before a strong wind. Lol was inspired by a painting in the Merseyside Maritime Museum's collection. *West Derby off Egremont* was painted by Thomas Dove (1811 – 1886). Lol has also created an ornate wooden cased chiming wall clock inspired by Victorian timepieces.



When not working in the *Lowlands* grounds with other volunteers, he has also repaired and donated other period clocks. Here Lol is seen winding up the small clock on the mantelpiece in the period room. The pleasant chiming of these clocks enhances the historic atmosphere of *Lowlands*.



Saved... in a way

I was handed the small piece of decorative plaster by Frankla Corris shortly after I became WDS chairman, **writes Stephen Guy.**

"I'd like you to have it," she said.

"I picked it up in Deysbrook Hall when it was being demolished."

I learnt later that our late archivist had researched this former West Derby gem.

I had heard of this big house which stood near where I grew up off Deysbrook Lane. It was pulled down when I was small but my elder brother David remembers it well.

"We used to play there," he told me recently.

"One of the upstairs rooms had no floor. We used to crawl around the edges. Mother would have killed me if she'd found out!"

These pictures are taken from a feature in the December 1911 issue of *The Architectural Review*. This high-quality glossy magazine examined past and present edifices from modest houses and commercial buildings to huge mansions and sprawling private estates.

The article, penned by D S MacColl, is called *The Decorations by Alfred Stevens at Deysbrook, near Liverpool*.



When it appeared the Hall (above) was used as a children's hospital.

Even then, there were fears for the future of the stunning decorated ceilings with their paintings and intricate designs executed by Stevens and skilled craftsmen.

MacColl wrote: *What is to be the fate of these decorations? It has been suggested that the most satisfactory scheme would be to set the three rooms apart as reception and board rooms if building extension should take place, with an arrangement by which the public might be admitted at certain times. Failing that it might be best to remove the panels bodily and set them up elsewhere.*



... At the present time ...the decorations show some signs of wear, being cracked in places and otherwise damaged.

He concludes: *If left untended, what is likely to be their ultimate fate?*



Alfred Stevens (1817 – 75) was probably the finest draughtsman and decorative painter that England has ever produced. However, like many artists, the brilliance of his work was only really recognised after his death.

In 1847 he was approached by Liverpool magistrate, merchant and landowner Richard Blundell-Hollinshead-Blundell to decorate Deysbrook Hall.

Around this time nearby *Lowlands* and St James's Church were also built – giving an indication of the great wealth in the area.

The Army moved in during the Second World War and there were renewed fears for Stevens' fine murals and artwork. In 1948 they were removed, helped with a £2,000 donation from the Art Fund.



The works were moved to the Walker Art Gallery collections where they remain in store. The gallery also has 16 Stevens paintings including portraits and landscapes. I have seen the huge wooden crates containing the ceiling and wall works. It is believed the crates have never been opened.

Croxteth

I think it might be possible for these masterpieces of British decorative art to be installed at Croxteth Hall – funding permitting.

At about the time Deysbrook Hall was demolished in the 1950s, a disastrous fire destroyed the Queen Anne wing of Croxteth Hall. It remains empty of fittings to this day.

The Deysbrook decorations deserve to be seen and would attract visitors to Liverpool.

- *The Army remained on the Deysbrook land for many years before it was eventually sold for development. Ironically, the massive supermarket near the site is about the same size of Deysbrook Hall.*

Chairman's Comments

Many talented people have lived in West Derby or been associated with the area, even fleetingly.

I began to muse about this when a long-time resident told me about *Gone with the Wind* star

Vivien Leigh staying as their guest in one of the Court roads in later life.

When I was young the leading local personality was **Bessie Braddock**, a friend of my grandparents who attended Labour Party meetings at her home in Zig Zag Rd.



I was delighted when this plaque was put up at the house some years ago. At one time she was the second most famous woman in Britain – after the Queen.

There should be more of these plaques – they would help interpret our district but there seems to be a reluctance to put them up here.

The one to Mrs Braddock was installed by English Heritage – apparently you have to be dead 20 years before you get one. Presumably this is to allow time for anything embarrassing to emerge after your demise.

Classic

Scriptwriter **Eddie Braben** wrote his classic *Morecambe and Wise* shows while living in West Derby.

Actor **Michael Williams**, who married Judi Dench, also lived off Blackmoor. I remember my mum getting a first-hand account from Mrs Williams about Judi's first visit.

Pop singer **Black** (*It's a Wonderful, Wonderful Life*) was better known as Colin

Vearncombe around here – his ancestor was the Earl of Sefton's blacksmith.

Bill Shankly lived his Liverpool days craftily overlooking Everton's Bellefield training ground. At one time Liverpool FC owned houses on Leyfield Rd and Anfield legend **Ron Yates** lived in one. Then there was that other great TV comedy writing talent **Carla Lane** who wrote a string of huge hits ranging from *The Liver Birds* to *Butterflies*.

She was responsible for saving *Claremont* in Sandforth Rd from dereliction when she converted it back into a single residence.

Stop

In the early 1960s I had a school friend in Almonds Green who was among local children who watched **The Beatles** rehearsing at the Casbah Club.

He described **Lennon and McCartney** waiting with their guitars for the 61 bus taking them home.

George Harrison spent a great deal of time at *Lowlands* aged just 15 or 16 when he played with the resident group, the Les Stewart Quartet. **Ringo Starr** performed with Rory Storm and the Hurricanes as did a host of musicians who also became internationally famous. Many are still performing including **The Searchers** and **Gerry and the Pacemakers** - I saw them advertised on a double bill in North Wales recently.

Boycott

Beatles manager **Brian Epstein** boycotted *Lowlands* after being asked for 2s 6d (12.5p) admission. This led its basement Pillar Club to hire non-Epstein musicians from further afield including **The Hollies**, **Herman's Hermits** and **The Barron Knights**.

Many famous people were guests of Lord and Lady Sefton at Croxteth Hall including **The Queen** and Hollywood stars **Errol Flynn**, **Douglas Fairbanks Jnr** and **Rex Harrison**, whose dad played for West Derby Hockey Club.

Stephen Guy