

# West Derby Society

# NEWSLETTER

Spring 2011

## Society's New Leaflet

The West Derby Society (WDS) now has a much-needed publicity flyer to promote its work. Designed by member Eric Preston, 2,500 copies of the full-colour leaflet have been produced by a local printer.



The Society's painting of West Derby Village by renowned Victorian Liverpool artist Hugh Magenis (1884) is featured on the front.

Other landmarks illustrated are the Courthouse, Lowlands, Croxteth Hall, Eddesbury (formerly Margaret Bevan School) and the Village fountain.

Along with details of the society and contact information, there is a membership application form. The new leaflet is particularly handy when the West Derby Courthouse is open, for example. Copies are also available at our meetings.

## Ernest Cookson School

Older members may remember the small holding that many years ago bordered the Cheshire Lines railway next to West Derby Station.

An elderly man lovingly tended his fruit and vegetables. About 1963 the Ernest Cookson School was built on the site. It was named after Alderman Cookson who lived in Field House, a villa next to Lowlands. He saved Lowlands from demolition in the 1930s following the death of the last resident Mrs Margaret Withers. Alderman Cookson, whose family gave distinguished civic service to Liverpool, sold Lowlands to West Derby Community Association in 1957.

Now the Ernest Cookson School has been transferred to a new building in Bankfield Rd, Stoneycroft.

The old school was demolished recently and the site landscaped (below).



The West Derby Society is keeping a close watch on this site. No plans for its future use have been announced. Green space is very important in our district and any plans would need to enhance the surrounding area which includes the popular cycle track and footpath following the course of the old railway.

## Managing Change

**The original Cardinal Heenan School is being demolished to be replaced by a new building, writes Alastair Caird.**

It dates from about 1850 and was originally used as a workhouse. Later it became Leyfield School run by the Sisters of Charity. In 1958 it was renamed Cardinal Allen and in 1983 became Cardinal Heenan.

An old map shows the area is almost unrecognisable at first glance – long-vanished mansions such as Whinmoor and Eaton House stand in open tracts of land. Alder Hey sits proudly where the hospital now stands and Springfield can be seen on the edge of the park. Note the Nelson monument which is still in situ.

### Work

Our chairman, Stephen Guy, works long and hard behind the scenes on behalf of West Derby. To most members he is the face of the society, introducing our monthly meetings and taking questions. He also plans and organises our annual evening mystery tour and day trip.

Stephen appears on both TV and radio on behalf of West Derby and the West Derby Society in particular. He is also heavily involved in Lowlands and the Courthouse – it is quite some job.

As an example of his behind-the-scenes work I thought I'd use part of our planning objections to the development of the Bellefield training ground into an unwanted housing estate.

I précis just one paragraph of his work:

This is a greenfield site that has never been developed. Everton FC first used these fields as a training ground in the 1920s. The land was once the private park surrounding a large house called Bellefield, belonging to the Bates shipping family, which was demolished in 1930 after being used as a club house for a time (originally for the Cunard sports club).

This proposal would result in the loss of valuable open space for short-term financial gain and would lead to the loss of open air amenities and be detrimental to the environment.

It would also be against current City Council policy resisting building on playing fields without replacing them. Liverpool needs to retain its open spaces. There is plenty of derelict land about the city and areas of abandoned and derelict housing crying out for redevelopment eg Gillmoss and Norris Green. West Derby needs a leisure centre and the Society urges Everton FC – a wealthy soccer club with a long history in the city – to donate or lease this land to the community

as a leisure facility. There are currently waiting lists of between two and 10 years for allotments, so this would be a viable alternative.

### **Time**

Much time and research went into this objection – one of many planning letters. In the event it finally failed after several years of hearings. However, I give it as an example of our chairman's consistent work on behalf of West Derby.

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

### **Minutes**

The West Derby Society Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held at Lowlands on Wednesday 19 January 2011.

Chairman Stephen Guy opened the meeting at 7.30 pm.

**Apologies:** Tony Green.

**Minutes of the last AGM:** The chairman read the minutes of the previous AGM.

**Matters arising:** There were no matters arising.

### **Chairman's Report**

The year 2010 was memorable because the West Derby Society became a founder member of Civic Voice, the successor to the Civic Trust in the North West. This is a fledgling organisation but seems to be pressing all the tight buttons and keeping us informed about initiatives.

We do get regular invitations to attend their events and functions which we have occasionally taken up. It is very important that the Society belongs to a broader organisation because it gives us a say in national issues. We also have the backing of Civic Voice and can call on its assistance if necessary.

The year also saw the sad passing of Frankla Corris MBE in April. Frankla was a legend in West Derby and a great supporter of the West Derby Society. Her invaluable historic knowledge was a great inspiration to many people including myself.

Her legacy includes the many photographs and documents she amassed over the years which are invaluable not only now but for generations to come.

### **Improvements**

The use of Lowlands is increasing and some recent improvements have been made including the refurbishment of the car park. The Society is indeed privileged to have such a distinguished home. Peggy Simpson is not standing for re-election to the committee after many years of loyal support. She and her late husband Bert were among the Society's founder members in 1977. We look forward to seeing Peggy at future meetings when the nights get lighter.

This leaves a vacancy on the committee which I must admit does not meet formally very often but which is the backbone of the Society.

I think the standard of our speakers improves every year. Among the 2010 highlights for me was Lynne Edge's erudite talk on her restoration of the Lusitania memorial. I also particularly enjoyed Dr Thomas's account of the Mimosa carrying Welsh emigrants to Patagonia.

Once again our outings went smoothly - I very much enjoy organising these trips and compliment Parr's Coaches for their excellent service.

The attraction of the evening mystery tour is still strong and this time we took a meandering journey to Churchtown..

The day trip to Cartmel and Grange-over-Sands gave us an unusual choice of two places for lunch. The area was chosen because a number of Edwardian glass slides, donated to the Society in 2009, were taken around Cartmel.

Finally we must not forget the Courthouse which will be opening every Sunday starting on 3 April and ending on 30 October 2011 (but not Easter Sunday). Our thanks once again to all the

volunteers – most of them Society members – who give up their time to show the public our tiny Tudor treasure.

We look forward to 2011 and 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 2010**

<b>Incoming</b>	£
<b>Subscriptions</b>	780.00
<b>Misc</b>	241.60
<b>Donations</b>	83.90
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,105.50</b>

<b>Out-going</b>	
<b>Hire of hall</b>	180.00
<b>Speakers</b>	120.00
<b>Print / Post / Stationery</b>	164.20
<b>Misc</b>	163.98
<b>Donations</b>	35.47
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>663.65</b>

WDS has not had a bad year. At the beginning of 2010 we had thick snow which meant we had to post all the newsletters to members. This meant no hand deliveries, increasing our costs on print/post/stationery. We have made up for it with donations as they and our book / magazines sales have increased dramatically. Thank you.

In May I transferred £493.48 from Barclays to Santander (formerly Alliance & Leicester) to make £2,500 in our savings account which only made a pitiful £1.96 in interest. I looked around for the best deals but there were none as I was only greeted with "savings are not doing well". We can only hope for better interest rates this year.

The evening coach outing cost £295 and the day trip £395, totalling £690. We had a shortfall of £49 on ticket sales but the raffle made up the loss so we had a surplus of £7.

Barclays community account balance 31.12.10	£1,059.73
Santander balance 31.12.10	£2,501.96
Giving WDS a <b>grand total</b> of	<b>£3,561.69</b>

**Stephanie Grogan**, Hon Treasurer

**Election of officers:** All committee members resigned and offered themselves for re-election. All were re-elected unanimously.

**Next AGM:** The meeting was told it would be held on Wednesday 18 January 2012.

**AOB:** There was no other business.

The AGM closed at 7.50 pm.

### **Other News**

- The West Derby Village, Tenants and Business Association, our sister organisation, is 10 years old in April 2011. Congratulations! See their website [www.westderbyvillage.com](http://www.westderbyvillage.com)

- WDS member Margaret Thompson has donated items for the Lowlands period room. They include a large basin, Victorian kid gloves, ornaments, baby wear, teapots and china. Our thanks for answering the appeal. The room now looks more lived in but we still need an iron or brass bedstead, wardrobe and washstand!
- The great-granddaughter of Hugh Magenis, who painted our West Derby Village view, is planning to visit Lowlands to see the artwork.

## Plaza Memories

**We** have been contacted by 73-year-old Arthur Moore, formerly of West Derby but now of Hereford.

He shares his memories of the West Derby Picture House later called the Plaza (below).



Mr Moore writes: The cinema went through a refurbishment programme – early in the 1950s I assume. As I recall the whole of the interior was redecorated and smartened up.

Either completely new seats were installed to the back of the cinema (the posh seats) or the original ones were simply re-upholstered.

On balance I think they were new seats because I recall there being double seats (for courting couples?) in place after the refurbishment.

I hadn't remembered there being any seats like that prior to the refurbishment.

The new seats would have occupied perhaps about one third of the entire seating. It all seemed very splendid.

I also recall treating my Mum to attend an evening performance around the time the cinema was reopened after the refurbishment. I think this was for us to watch Disney's Pinocchio but I am not 100 per cent sure. It might have been spring or summer 1954.

I usually went along to the Saturday afternoon kids' matinee. Seats were either 6d or 9d and I would have paid to sit in the ninepenny seats. My family would have considered sixpenny seats being for the scruffs!

I looked up West Derby Picture House in my 1952 Kelly's Directory and it records the manager's name as Percy Tonge.

I recall seeing the manager (and assume that it was probably Percy Tonge) on a number of occasions walking away from the cinema during daytime wearing a very smart-looking homburg hat and generally dressed very impressively.

I also recall that he would often have been carrying an interesting-looking leather case / bag which probably had the takings inside it ie he was probably on the way to the bank.

### **Sightings**

My other sightings of him took place at the kids' Saturday matinee when he would appear on stage after the lights had been switched back on.

He warned all of us kids that unless we settled down, cut out the row and stopped throwing bits of rubbish upwards towards the ceiling (where they were caught up in the beam from the projection room) the afternoon show would be cancelled.

Needless to say the row, and all that went with it, started up again within about one minute of his having left the stage and the lights going back down.

There must have been a great many kids in the area for every seat in the cinema to get filled up like that every week. Perhaps many came from out of the area – I just don't know.

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The new Lowlands car park and bays.

### **Chairman's Comments**

I joined the hundreds of people who had a look around the old Cardinal Heenan School buildings on Saturday 12 March.

I had never been in the main part of the former workhouse – what a grim place it must have been originally.

The school produced an excellent booklet called Heenan's History. The Story So Far ..

Former pupil Marie D'arcy recalls Duffy's Farm run by three brothers in the 1950s.

She was a milk monitor and would visit the farm to collect the milk churns.

I also have memories of this farm, an atmospheric reminder of West Derby's rural past, standing next to Leyfield House.

I only remember it being derelict and in May 1970 it was set on fire and later demolished.



I saw smoke billowing up and took this picture. The site is now marked by a grassy mound overlooking the floodlit all-weather sports pitches.

This got me musing about how some buildings go and others survive. It is regrettable that few of West Derby's farm buildings remain.

The home farm at Croxteth Hall is a wonderful, working example. There is Rice Farm in Yew Tree Lane and some others.

Likewise until about 50 years ago there were quite a few small holdings and market gardens before developers swallowed up the land.

Much of the land in West Derby was not ideal for growing cereal crops and was often used for grazing and orchards. **Stephen Guy**

