

# NEWSLETTER

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50p to non-members

## RETURN TO LOWLANDS

The West Derby Society's new meeting room at *Lowlands* (pictured) is on the first floor overlooking Haymans Green and the garden. This new big room is a much-needed alternative to the main hall downstairs. It was created by joining two rooms together to create a flexible space that can be returned to two rooms using a soundproof screen. The walls and doors of the room have been painted in pale pink terracotta with white for the woodwork and ceilings. As with the whole of *Lowlands*, all the Grade II-listed windows have been expertly restored with brass fittings.



The colour schemes throughout the building are similar to those that would have been used in Victorian times. They are based on colours popular around 1846 when Thomas Haigh built the house on land leased from the Marquess of Salisbury. The new decor does not reflect the High Victorian taste of 1890 when the building was extended. The room is enhanced with a modern fitted grey carpet and contemporary strip lighting.

Brereton's the builders handed over the *Lowlands* keys to the owners, the West Derby Community Association, on 16 March 2009. The contents had been in a container on the lawn since before the work started. On 28 March more than a dozen volunteers moved everything back inside.



Society members Stephanie Grogan, Eric Preston and Alastair Caird are pictured helping to shift things into the main hall. The items were then allocated to various rooms



This meant carrying things up the garden steps then ferrying them up the stairs to the first and second floors. **Cont ...**

Let's take a look at the Society's fabulous newly-refurbished and renovated home. The £1.2 million project has been paid for by the Heritage Lottery Fund and other leading charities and individuals. When the project started in 2004, Liverpool architects the Griffiths Thompson Partnership were given the brief to return the building to its original Victorian appearance. This has been done with great success, enhancing the stunning beauty and atmosphere of the much-loved building.

### **Alterations**

*Lowlands* had suffered over the years since it ceased to be a private residence following the death of widow Mrs Margaret Withers in 1930.

It was empty for several years before being rescued by Alderman Ernest Cookson, who lived next door.

Alterations were made in the Second World War when the Inland Revenue converted the building to offices when they relocated staff following the bombing of the India Buildings. In 1957 further alterations were made following its conversion into the community centre.

The *Lowlands* Renewal Project aimed to remove the worst of the alterations while keeping the best, taking into account that the building was for public rather than private use.

This meant strengthening many of the floors, replacing or refurbishing the roof, removing rot and replacing the central heating and drains.

In addition, a new lift was installed for the use of disabled people and others who cannot use the stairs. Other disabled facilities have also been installed. All the internal locks have been replaced and modern security measures put in place. Skilled craftsmen were brought in to repair the beautiful Rococo Revival and High Victorian ceilings.

The 1950s stage was removed from the main hall to reveal an alcove where trios, quartets and pianists performed at social events.

Thomas Randles Withers, chairman of Liverpool Stock Exchange, entertained business contacts, artists and writers from all over Britain.

Other new facilities include a modern catering kitchen – your Society helped pay for the dishwasher.



*Lowlands* now looks as fresh as it must have done when Mr Withers first bought and extended his new home.

A top quality carpet with brass stair rods now adorns the main staircase (pictured). New laminated floor coverings have been installed on the ground floor.

Fundraising still needs to be done. The Association has applied to the Big Lottery for £223,000 to fund a development officer and two facilitators plus a new car park. Next on the agenda are the boundary walls.



Volunteers have always been the mainstay of *Lowlands*. Your chairman, a trustee and member of the Project Team, is pictured steam-cleaning more than 50 upholstered chairs at Easter. The chairs were donated by other institutions as surplus to requirements.

**There is a *Lowlands* Open Day between 10 am and 3 pm on Saturday 9 May 2009.**

## **A Case of Recycling**

Finch House was built by Richard Gildart around the year 1776 on land purchased from Lord Sefton, *writes Alastair Caird*.

He came from a family of prominent Liverpool merchants and had been a Liverpool MP between 1734 and 1754.

The house, in Finch Lane, was later occupied by Ellis Mather who married Blanche, daughter of Lawrence Heyworth of neighbouring Yew Tree House.

Mather sold Finch House to Lord Derby. A later occupant was a man called Brammall, a manufacturer of dry soap who had associations with the Shakespeare and other Liverpool theatres.

Finch House was said to be very well-built with special hand-moulded bricks of superior quality - they were nine-and-a-half by two-and-three-quarter inches. It took skilled craftsmen seven years to build.

### **Mahogany**

All the doors were mahogany with shelves and drawers made from walnut. Finch House was demolished in March 1912. The bricks and fittings including cornices and panelling were recycled by moving them to Knowsley Hall for other uses.

Gill Moss and Page Moss were originally marshes which at one time came under the Parliamentary Division of Bootle.

Both names are reminders of the vast bog lands that made up the landscape of south Lancashire.

At Gillmoss there used to be an old house owned by a Mr Valentine which had a Roman Catholic chapel hidden in the roof.

The entrance was through what looked like a stable door, up three flights of stairs and through another door.

Services were held in the days of penal laws against Catholics.

Members of the Molyneux family (later Earls of Sefton) were among the worshippers before they converted to the Church of England.

Another building with boggy associations was Moss House which stood at the junction of Derby Lane and what is now Queens Drive. On its downspouts it had the date 1776 and the initials P & MR, standing for Peter and Mary Rigby. Peter was a merchant from Pool Lane in the heart of Liverpool who became mayor in 1774. In his time Liverpool was growing rapidly and two churches were built.

### **Stone**

Peter laid the foundation stone for St John's after which the gardens are named. It was considered to be an ugly building which later detracted from St George's Hall. The church was demolished more than a century ago. Moss House is also long demolished and all that remains of the estate is Moss Cottage (below).



It stands opposite St Paul's in Stoneycroft and was part of a dairy at one time. The old tree by the site of Moss House is said to have once stood in the grounds.

Moving south along Queens Drive you come to the location of Fir Grove House where the fire station now stands.

Joseph Jackson lived there in 1790. He was described as a wealthy landowner whose offices were in Callender Court off Derby Street (Whitechapel).

At the top of the stairs in Fir Grove House was a glass dome over the landing. At the centre of the dome was an image of a dove holding an olive branch. The dove was standing on a serpent in the act of striking the bird. There was also a scroll with a crest similar to the Jackson family of Bath.

Joseph was destined to found a notable local family. His daughter and heiress **Cont ...**



married Roger Parr, a merchant of Paradise Street in Liverpool.

Their son Joseph succeeded to his grandfather's estate, living at Fir Grove until 1820. The Parrs ran a renowned bank and a later member of the family, Thomas Parr, took an active interest in the charity schools in Old Swan. He lived in what is now the Royal Institution in Colquitt Street and the family name is remembered in adjoining Parr Street.

While we are in the centre of Liverpool, the old picture below shows the pedestrian crossing outside Woolworths in Church Street. Note Coopers Corner in the background and the policeman (centre) attempting to control the hordes from his raised box.



**PLEASE REMEMBER:** If you have not renewed your membership for 2009 this will be your last *Newsletter*.

### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2009**

The annual general meeting (AGM) was held at St James's Church, West Derby, on 21 January 2009.

The minutes are as follows:

Chairman Stephen Guy opened the meeting at 7.35 pm and welcomed the many members who attended.

**Apologies:** Stan and Rita Guy, Raymond and Elda Lempereur.

**Minutes of the last AGM** were read and approved.

**Matters arising from the minutes:** None.

**Chairman's Report:** This year 2009 marks my 10th anniversary as chairman of the West

Derby Society (WDS) as I was first elected at the annual general meeting in January 1999. 2009 also marks the Society's move back to Lowlands which has been transformed with new facilities, a new roof, new drains, strengthened floors and new colour schemes. It was in the summer of 1998 that I was approached by the then Society chairman, Jack Cooper, who was marrying and moving to Canada. He had attended a Blue Badge guides' meeting in the Liver Building at which I spoke in my role as spokesman for the museums.

### **Proud**

I happened to let drop that I was from West Derby and proud of it and so the rest is history. My first chairman's talk back 1999 was about the Herdman painting of West Derby Village so it is fitting that this important work is featured on the new 2009 membership card, as you can see. I have very much enjoyed being chairman for the past 10 years and am happy to continue for as long as the members wish. However, this is not a permanent position and any member can stand if they wish, as they can for any committee role. The year 2008 was once again a good one for the Society.

### **Buoyant**

Membership remained buoyant and we had some excellent speakers. As you can see from the membership card, we have an equally exciting line-up for 2009. We have continued our active involvement in planning issues, lobbying the planning authorities and appearing at meetings. We have scored a number of successes and suffered a few setbacks in the past year. Planning is where we, as a Society, have an increasingly high profile. The 2008 trips went very well although the mystery tour in June was hardly flaming June weather. The sprint from the coach to the pubs in Parkgate was memorable for many of us. The day trip to Llangollen was highly enjoyable. For me, it brought back many memories of previous visits stretching back to the 1960s. **Cont...**

Please note the dates of the 2009 trips which again follow the patterns of previous years. I would welcome suggestions of members for both outings – that's if you would prefer an alternative to the mystery tour, of course! The Courthouse has once again been a successful focus for the Society in 2008 when we had more than 900 visitors during the two-hour Sunday openings. Thanks again to all the volunteers for giving their time. We will start circulating the new 2009 list at next month's meeting.

Our thanks to St James's for putting up with us over the past year or so. We know that conditions are not exactly ideal sometimes but appreciate the flexibility and support of the church. We expect to be back at Lowlands for the March meeting but will confirm this at next month's meeting.

We will be gathering in the new large meeting room upstairs which of course will be accessible via the new lift as well as the stairs.

Finally, please allow me to express my appreciation to all members for your support during the year. I would like to mention you all individually but had better not otherwise we'll be here all night.

#### **Treasurer's Report 2008**

<b>In-coming</b>	<b>£</b>
Subscriptions	760.00
Miscellaneous	60.90
Donations	<u>1009.00</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1829.90</b>
<b>Out-going</b>	
Hire of hall	180.00
Speakers	125.00
Print/Post/Stationery	131.14
Miscellaneous	71.96
Donations	<u>10.00</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>518.10</b>

We have had a very good year with our finances. The subs going up to £10 has enabled us to keep things going smoothly while the hire of the hall at £20 has also helped us.

The magazine sales has brought in a tremendous amount of funds – a lot higher than previous years. Thank you all very much. Some of our speakers were kind enough not to want a contribution. In May we heard that the WDS had been left a £1,000 legacy by the late Mr C J Anderson of West Derby. We are all very grateful for this. The money is now making interest in the Alliance & Leicester (A&L) account waiting to see what shall become of it.

I transferred £55.05 from the Community Account into the A&L to make it £1,500. We made £18.53 in interest.

The evening coach trip cost £270 and made a loss of £15.

The day trip was £328 and made a profit of £8. There was a raffle on the coach which made £53, making the Society a profit of £46 on the two trips. I am very pleased with the finances and hope to make a repeat of it this year.

The Community Account balance at the end of 2008 was £1,116.14.

The A&L balance year ending 2008 was £1,518.53.

Grand total: £2,634.67

Stephanie Grogan, Hon Treasurer

The chairman thanked Steph for her continued good stewardship of our accounts. The report was accepted.

**Election of officers:** All committee members stood down before standing for office again and were unanimously re-elected.

**Any other business:** None.

The AGM closed at 7.55 pm. The chairman then gave his annual illustrated talk, entitled *Life in 1890*.

#### **SOCIETY OUTINGS**

We will once again be going on a mystery tour leaving West Derby Village at 6.30 pm on Wednesday 17 June 2009. Fare £6 each. Be prepared for surprises!

The day trip is to picturesque Beaumaris in Anglesey. We leave the Village at 9 am on Saturday 4 July 2009. Fare £8 each.

***Seats only secured by advance payment.***

## **Tudor Times**

The West Derby Courthouse opened for the 2009 season on Sunday 5 April.

Your chairman did a recce a week or two beforehand and noticed a festering pile of rubbish against the railings at the back. He alerted the city council and the junk was removed promptly.

Security men from Croxteth Hall again opened up for us on the first Sunday.

The two volunteers gave the Courthouse its annual spring clean – windows, floors and furnishings were given a good wipe-down.

### **Warped**

Two wooden strips of panelling had warped and come away from the wall during the winter closure. They were part of a modern section installed during the restoration and refurbishment works in 2005. The damage was reported to the city council, owners of the Grade II\*-listed building.

Otherwise there was nothing amiss following the months of closure apart from the usual litter under the door.

There were 17 visitors of all ages during the first day – a good number for so early in the season.

**There are still plenty of gaps in the volunteer list for 2009. Please contact the chairman if you can spare a couple of hours, particularly in August and September.**

More Tudor news from the Village ...

The Society learns that a local builder has teamed up with a chef with a view to using the Yeoman's House as a cafe and restaurant.

WDS has been concerned for a long time about this lovely empty sandstone Grade II-listed building which is about the same age as the Courthouse – late Tudor.

The Society has advised the prospective purchasers about how to proceed with conserving this important building. This would include restoring the white limewash rendering which was a feature for centuries.

## **Planning News**

**A** new application for outline planning permission has been submitted for the house and stables at **43 Almonds Green**.

As can be seen from our pictures below, both are now empty and dilapidated but not beyond repair.



The stables dating from around 1973 are behind the house, which dates from the 1920s.



The property was bought by Liverpool builders following the death of the occupant. The new owners submitted plans for sheltered accommodation on the site last year. After being opposed by WDS and local residents, the plans were withdrawn.

The new plans are little different – a big block of flats and detached dwellings at the rear. An addition is a residents' communal hall. WDS has objected to this new application saying it is out of keeping with existing single-occupancy dwellings and will overshadow its neighbours.

Seven years after we unsuccessfully lobbied against a second betting office in the Village, the owners now want to return the listed shop to retail use and move around the corner next to Ladbrokes. WDS has not objected.

### Chairman's Comments

I spend a lot of time researching West Derby history. Members will know that I have a particular interest in the wealthy merchants who played a large part in community life in Victorian times.

We may have faded photographs of some of the luminaries who lived in local villas and mansions. They are carefully posed and give little away.

It was therefore a great treat the other day to stumble upon a 1908 book of caricatures called *Bulls and Bears – Cartoons of Members and Ring Traders of the Liverpool Cotton Exchange*.

The drawings by J Wallace Coop are very amusing and capture the characters of the subjects far better than any photograph.

The gentleman below is James Arkle who lived in *Holly Mount*, Mill Lane.



This was a vast old mansion where I remember visiting my father in his Inland Revenue office sited there in the 1950s. I am intrigued by this caricature of dapper Mr Arkle – he was a keen sportsman in his youth, playing lawn tennis and hockey for West Derby. Does the mirror in the background hint at a touch of vanity? The Arkles family were well-known around here – I think the nephew of this man lived in *Marlfield* off Spring Grove. St Pauls' school

playing field was known as Arkles when I was young.

I think the next chap looks rather sinister.



This is Danson Cunningham who lived at Eddesbury – later the Margaret Bevan School – which is over the road from *Lowlands*. Mr Cunningham had been a member of the Liverpool Cotton Association for more than 40 years when this drawing was done.

This is a very cruel caricature as it shows the subject was boss-eyed. He is pictured standing in front of the fire which may imply he was rather careful with fuel bills.

When you read the biographies of these men it is plain that they led rather humdrum business lives spending their days watching cotton prices and serving on committees. It is no wonder they spread their wings in their spare time, building beautiful homes filled with books and artworks.

Both these men lived in superb houses. Arkle was a keen charity worker but Cunningham's only interest outside work seemed to be cricket.

I wonder how these men reacted when they saw the caricatures published in the *Liverpool Courier*?

We owe J Wallace Coop a debt for allowing us an insight into these two intriguing personalities. They contribute to our knowledge of an important period in West Derby history.

**Stephen Guy**



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## ***The New Lowlands***





