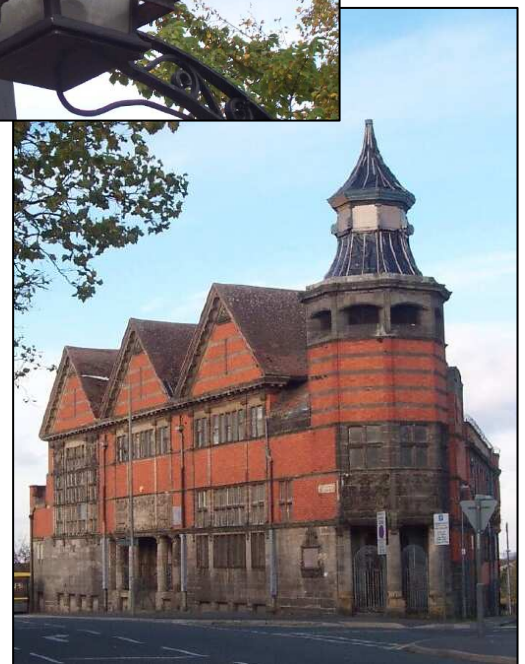
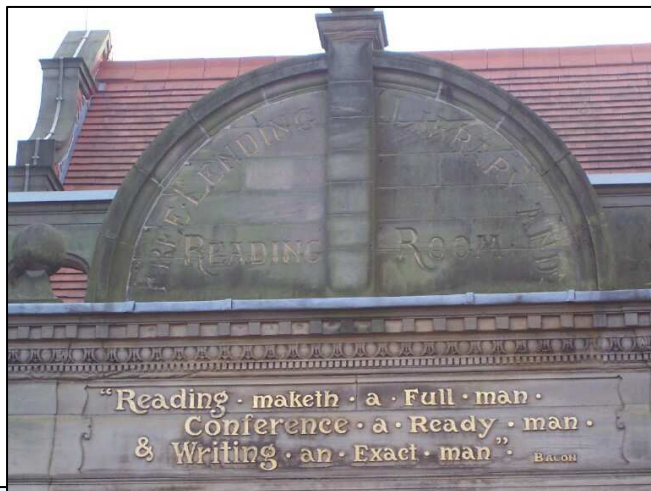


# THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY

*The national society for  
the study and  
protection of Victorian  
and Edwardian  
architecture and allied  
arts*

## LIVERPOOL GROUP NEWSLETTER

December 2011/ January 2012



Front & back  
cover:  
Shelmerdine's  
Branch  
Libraries...  
(see 19 May  
2012 tour)

## LECTURES

2.15pm, Saturday 21 January 2012, at Bishop Lloyd's Palace, 51 Watergate Row, CHESTER

**The Annual Business Meeting** will be followed by a talk from Peter Boughton, Keeper of Art and Architecture at the Grosvenor Museum. His subject will be '**The Artist in the Streets of Chester**'. Peter writes: "Chester is England's most picturesque city, the two-mile circuit of her walls enclosing two thousand years of history. The streets of Chester with their unique Rows, charming Tudor and Stuart half-timbered houses, and the spectacular buildings of the Victorian and Edwardian black-and-white revival have inspired artists for more than four centuries."

2.15pm, Saturday 18 February 2012, at the Quaker Meeting House, 22 School Lane, Liverpool

### **A PRACTICE LIKE NO OTHER: THE ARCHITECTURE OF SHARPE, PALEY & AUSTIN**

Former national Chairman, Geoff Brandwood, returns after his Scott analysis to celebrate the Lancaster firm whose churches are among the best of the Gothic Revival. Geoff's linked book is due for publication about this time. [Members with easy access to Chester may note that this talk will also be given to Chester Civic Trust at the Grosvenor Museum, 7.30pm, Wednesday 18 January.]

2.15pm, Saturday 3 March 2012, at the Quaker Meeting House, School Lane, Liverpool

### **THE JAPANESE ARCHITECTURAL SCENE**

Professor Neil Jackson, Charles Reilly Chair in Architecture at Liverpool University, returns after his Street analysis with an account of research into Japan's built environment, particular emphasis being placed on the 19th century.

2.15pm, Saturday 17 March 2012, at the Quaker Meeting House, School Lane, Liverpool.

### **THE LAXEY WHEEL**

Completed in 1854, the Isle of Man's Laxey Wheel is one of the great monuments of industrial archaeology. The wheel is 72ft 6ins in diameter, having been designed by the Manxman Robert Casement, ancestor of our speaker, retired Head Teacher David Casement. David will tell the story of how the wheel pumped water from the Laxey mines until 1920, with its subsequent purchase by the Manx government and its ultimate rôle as a key tourist attraction.

## EXCURSIONS

*Our two local excursions both focus (a little late) on centenaries: Shelmerdine's last branch library (Sefton Park) was in 1911, while Reilly's remodelling of Holy Trinity (last celebrated in Florence Gersten's July 2001 Wavertree walk) came in that same year. And much enthusiasm was generated by our last Wakefield trip back in 1997; now there are further reasons for a visit.*

Saturday 24 March 2012 - **WAVERTREE TRILOGY**

Dr Nicholas Beattie, retired Reader in Education at Liverpool University, has written a vivid account of Charles Reilly's remodelling and extension of Wavertree's Holy Trinity Church in 1911. This important building (intended by Reilly as a demonstration of what the classical style could achieve) will form the climax of a Wavertree visit guided by Dr Beattie. The afternoon will begin at 2pm at the 1838 Congregational Church, Hunter's Lane, followed by the 1906 Bluecoat School Chapel. The Bluecoat's architect was Arnold Thornely whom Reilly at first recommended for Holy Trinity, work ultimately praised by Quentin Hughes as "Reilly at his best" and by Pevsner as "truly remarkable". Meet at 1.45pm at the Wavertree Clock Tower, designed by Picton in 1884. We will then make the short walk along Church Road to Hunter's Lane for the Congregational Church. The subsequent visits to Bluecoat and Holy Trinity (both in Church Road) should finish by 4.30pm. Connecting buses to the Wavertree Clock Tower leave the Queen Square Bus Station at 1.20 (79), 1.23 (79c), 1.26 (79), 1.29 (78). Cost (to cover donations and tea/coffee): £6.

Saturday 19 May 2012 - **SHELMERDINE'S BRANCH LIBRARIES**

John Tiernan, who gave us a fine talk on Liverpool's Libraries a few years ago, will lead this coach trip to see the key Shelmerdine work. The visit will almost certainly visit Toxteth, Sefton Park, Garston, Wavertree and Kensington branches, with a look at now disused Everton. (See page 5/6 which may prove useful for the excursion.) Depart Dale St/North John St corner at 9.45am prompt. Return to City Centre by 1.30pm. Cost: £10 (includes tea/coffee at Toxteth Library).

Saturday 16 June 2012 – **MIDSUMMER IN WAKEFIELD**

Tony Murphy's latest trip promises to take advantage of the long daylight to provide plenty of good things in a city that shows much change of style in a relatively small area. The new attraction is Chipperfield's Hepworth Gallery which we will visit, along with the distinguished civic buildings (Town Hall by Collcutt), neo-classical Catholic Church, and the Scott remodelled Cathedral. Other probabilities are the Gissing House, the Frank Matcham theatre, and even a look at the nearby Yorkshire Sculpture Park. There is a new market and plenty of eating choices. Depart Dale St/North John St corner at 9.30am prompt. Return by 8pm. Cost [meals not included]: £25.

# THE LIBRARY BUILDERS

## COWELL, SHELMERDINE AND CARNEGIE

The death of Sir James Allanson Picton on 15 July 1889 brought to an end a period of nearly forty years' virtual domination of the Liverpool Public Library system by one man, as he had been chairman of the Corporation's Libraries Museums and Arts Committee since 1850. Picton was elected President of the Library Association of the United Kingdom in 1883 – a sign of the high regard in which he was held nationwide.

Liverpool promoted its own library legislation in 1852 because the 1850 *Public Libraries Act* only allowed for the product of a half-penny rate. Although this act was adopted by several councils – including Manchester – Liverpool Corporation also wished to establish a museum to house the collections of the 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Derby, so a larger rate precept was needed. Although this was successful, it did mean that the product of the penny rate was split between the library and the museum. It also meant that funds were not readily available for the erection of purpose-built libraries. Following the appointment of the first Chief Librarian, John Stuart Dalton, a reference library was established in the building of the Union Newsroom on the corner of Duke and Slater Streets. Two lending libraries were also established in existing school buildings in Park Lane (South) and Bevington Bush (North).

It was not until 1860 that Liverpool took possession of its first purpose-built central library (and museum) building in Shaw's Brow, designed by John Weightman and financed by the merchant, Sir William Brown (Shaw's Brow was soon renamed William Brown Street).

Although the town was to benefit by another impressive library building, the Picton Reference Library (1879 - Cornelius Sherlock), named to honour Sir James, the development of library services to areas outside the town centre had not progressed, despite requests for better provision from areas such as Toxteth Park. Following these approaches Peter Cowell, the Chief Librarian, was instructed to report the costs associated with setting up a library in the eastern area of the city and the possibility that school buildings could be used for reading rooms. Nothing came of his recommendations to build two further reading rooms until 1884, "owing", according to Cowell, "to financial difficulties, and to some extent, possibly, to a want of sympathy on the part of the Chairman of the Library Committee". It is obvious from this comment, written twenty years later, that Picton's interest was primarily the support of the reference library. Consequently Liverpool had fallen behind rival cities such as Birmingham and Manchester when it came to suburban library provision.

Following Picton's death, Cowell was at last free to advocate a better library service for the suburbs. This was the time at which Liverpool was beginning to incorporate areas outside the old boundaries of the city (Walton, West Derby, Wavertree and Toxteth were annexed in 1895, Garston in 1902 and Fazakerley in 1905). It was clear that a greater Liverpool area needed library provision on a wider scale and that Peter Cowell was the man for the job.

**Peter Cowell (1838-1909)**, Liverpool's third Chief Librarian, was appointed in 1875. He was the son of a joiner and a bonnet maker, born in Gloucester Street only yards away from the future William Brown Street, where he would later preside over the library service. He was appointed as a boy assistant in the new public library service in 1852 at the age of fourteen, with a salary of £50 per year. He issued the first book to be loaned by the library service - Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. After he became Chief Librarian Cowell also made his name nationally, becoming a founder member of the Council of the newly formed Library Association of the United Kingdom in 1877, a position he retained until his death. At the meetings of this and other professional organisations Cowell was a forceful figure, expressing strong views (sometimes liberal, more often conservative) on how he considered public libraries should be managed. He also demonstrated his professional commitment in a tangible way by a trip to the United States, at his own expense, to see how the Americans managed their public libraries.

In spite of this civic-minded behaviour one of Cowell's personal characteristics appeared to have been parsimony. Ralph Malbon, a recent historian of the library service during Cowell's period of office, quoting Library Committee minutes says 'One of Cowell's regular initiatives was to apply for an increase in salary and in 1866 when he was Superintendent of the branch libraries he referred to having "a small family, and £100 per year is quite exhausted in frugal housekeeping. I must keep one servant and a tolerably large house causes greater pecuniary demands. My situation is a respectable one, and I must make a corresponding appearance. To ask for greater pecuniary recognition may not be more than asking you to strengthen my hands to the effectual management of two of the most successful institutions of their kind in the kingdom". His salary was raised from £100 to £120 per year'. An irony associated with this request and its successful outcome is that in contemporary editions of Gore's *Liverpool Directory* Cowell is shown as living at the South Library, 5 Upper Parliament Street, presumably rent free!

With the agreement of Alderman Edward Samuelson, Picton's successor, Cowell embarked on a programme of branch library construction commencing with the East Library (later Kensington Library), opened in 1889. Cowell described the building as "ornate in style and admirably convenient. Designed and erected by the City Surveyor, Mr Thomas Shelmerdine, the plan and internal arrangements were the outcome of the suggestions of the Chief Librarian". At the opening ceremony Alderman Samuelson complimented the City Surveyor and the Chief Librarian on the manner in which their duties had been discharged. The Kensington library was so successful that it was extended in 1897.

This library was the first in a number of what must have been close collaborations between Cowell and **Thomas Shelmerdine (1845-1921)**, which led to Liverpool having a number of outstanding branch library buildings, some of them Grade II listed. He was born in Manchester, the son of Thomas Shelmerdine senior, an estate agent and valuer who moved to Liverpool in the 1840s. After an education at the Liverpool Royal Institution Schools he was apprenticed to Walter Scott, a Liverpool architect (two of Thomas's brothers, Edward and Henry, also trained as architects. Henry became the Chief Architect to the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway, designing the Exchange Station and Hotel building opened in 1884, as well as several office buildings in Liverpool. He was also the architect of St Paul's Church, Widnes, 1883-84). In 1869 Thomas started working in his father's office, where he added to his experience in architecture with knowledge of estate management. He was appointed, at the age of 26 in 1871, as the Corporation of Liverpool's Land Steward and Surveyor (and later Architect), at a salary of £700 per annum. He took management control of the vast corporate estate and over the following 45 years was responsible for slum clearance and street widening projects, public housing and school building, entailing expenditure of some £12,500,000. He designed Fazakerley, the Northern, and other hospitals; the wholesale fish market; the Fire Brigade HQ and Tramway Offices (both in Hatton Garden); a redesign of the Town Hall Council Chamber; Lister Drive Power Station; the City Analyst's Office at 126 Mount Pleasant (now part of the University of Liverpool), and the lay-out of St John's Gardens.

Quentin Hughes says that Shelmerdine "is credited with recommending to the Corporation that it should adopt and live up to the motto 'modernise everything'". In his libraries he varied the styles of architecture and created interesting-looking buildings that sometimes looked back to the Elizabethan era (Sefton Park) and the Italian Renaissance (Everton), or reflected the late nineteenth-century Arts and Crafts movement (Garston).

Shelmerdine also designed the fine Hornby Library, part of the William Brown Street Central Library complex (in total a Grade II\* building), paid for from the bequest of Hugh Frederick Hornby (1824-1899), a wealthy Liverpool merchant who left his entire collection of rare books, prints, autographs and manuscripts to the Corporation, along with the sum of £10,000 to build a suitable home for it. Shelmerdine produced an appropriately grand building which mirrors the importance of its contents superbly.

The third and possibly the most important character – certainly in terms of finance – in this delivery to Liverpool of examples of important heritage architecture and design was **Andrew Carnegie (1835- 1918)**, a Scottish-born American multi-millionaire, who made a great fortune in the iron industry in the United States. A ruthless and exploitative employer he attempted to soften his hard image by becoming a philanthropist on a major scale. In particular he gave money to build public libraries, not only in his adopted homeland, but also in the United Kingdom. He endowed 660 libraries in the British Isles at a cost of some \$12,000,000. In many instances this was because local councils were unwilling or unable to find the money needed to erect library buildings, and Carnegie's philanthropy was restricted to paying for the buildings alone: books and staff had to be provided by the library authority.

As a guest at the opening ceremony of Toxteth Library in 1902, Carnegie outlined his public library philosophy, "I like a free library because it is free. It is a grand symbol of true genuine democracy". As he had not paid for the building, he was able to add "this is more an exhibition of democracy than perhaps any library I have spoken in, because it is the gift of no citizen, of no man; but it is from foundation stone to turret paid for by taxation, so that the poorest citizen of Liverpool contributes in his proportion as much as the multi-millionaire in support not of a library, but of his library". Uniquely, it was because of the philanthropist's admiration of Liverpool's public library progress that Carnegie spontaneously *offered* to pay for the erection of Everton Library in 1896, with the Corporation providing the books and staff. He subsequently paid for the erection of a further six branch libraries and three reading rooms in Liverpool between 1903 and 1914, at a current equivalent total cost of \$5,000,000.

The Chief Librarian until 1909, responsible for the commissioning of these fine buildings, was Peter Cowell. The architect with responsibility for the design of all but one of this very interesting and diverse range of civic buildings, so admired in the twentieth and the early twenty-first century, was Thomas Shelmerdine.

The combined efforts of Carnegie, Cowell and Shelmerdine helped to transform a public library system, started in 1852 as a dynamic pioneering organisation but which had largely stood still under Picton's control, into a large, nationally admired service. The two Liverpool men had interesting character traits, which added an element of humanity to their careers; although more is known about Cowell, Shelmerdine's obituary in the *Liverpool Courier* refers to his practical involvement in his work: 'In all things the late Mr Shelmerdine was thorough. Indeed on more than one occasion his personal interest and supervision of works nearly cost him his life, he having several escapes during building and reconstruction operations'.

The obituaries record that when examining the vaults of the demolished St George's Church, Derby Square (probably when the site was being prepared for the erection of the Victoria Monument), Shelmerdine contracted typhoid fever and he was considered fortunate to have survived the illness. It was also recorded that during another site inspection a large block of stone fell during hoisting operations, narrowly missing the architect. A third event happened during the Liverpool general transport strike in 1911, while inspecting the works at Penrhyn Street School, when a striker threw a brick at him.

Shelmerdine was a member of the executive committee which organised the building of the Liverpool Anglican Cathedral. In this capacity he attended the cathedral foundation stone laying ceremony on 28 July 1904, where he was presented to King Edward VII. Although Thomas Shelmerdine was a distinguished local architect, his fame does not appear to have spread beyond the greater Liverpool area. Little is known of his private life, except that following his marriage in 1871 he and his wife moved to Egerton Park in Rock Ferry, returning to the Liverpool side of the river later in life to Blundellsands. He was interested in sports and was a valued slow left-hand bowler for Rock Ferry. He was later Captain of the West Lancashire Golf Club, and was also a keen cyclist.

Cowell by contrast was a regional and national figure in the new profession of library management, even achieving a short obituary in the *Times* (13 February 1909). His death notice in the *Library Association Record* (vol.11, 1909, pp 136-137) described him as ... 'essentially an administrator [who] held the view that the main duty of a librarian is for others to do literary work rather than do it himself. So far as library administration work was concerned Mr Cowell never grew old. In his earlier years he was always experimenting ... When through Mr Carnegie's generosity public libraries began to spread over the country, many members of committees and librarians journeyed to Liverpool to see its splendidly equipped public libraries, and Mr Cowell thoroughly appreciated the compliment implied'.

Cowell's concern to restrict expenditure mentioned by Malbon (in connection with his civic duties) must also have been carried over into his personal life. Although, as we have seen, in 1866, he lived 'over the shop', and was pleading hardship, if not poverty – but by the time of his death he lived in Meols, a very prosperous part of Wirral, and his estate was valued at £8,591 11s 3d net (approximately £694,000 at current values).

## John Tiernan

### THE SHELMERDINE BRANCH LIBRARIES (Chronologically) (See May 19 tour)

**KENSINGTON (1890 & 1897)** "The first purpose-built branch library in Liverpool. Very pretty, and asymmetrical. 'The Builder' called the style 'Germanic Renaissance'. Red brick and stone dressings. Entrance porch with little semicircular pediment, and Ionic columns. Octagonal white-painted timber and glass lantern topped by a cupola. The design is full of little inventions; one of the most prominent is the arcaded parapets." \_\_\_\_\_ *Pollard & Pevsner, "Lancashire: Liverpool and the South-West" (2006)*

**EVERTON (1895-96)** "Unusually excellent. Red brick and much stone. To the street three identical gables, but the treatment below differs entirely. In the middle the recessed entrance with short bulgy columns, on the left one long mullioned-and-transomed window, on the right a two-storey treatment and a small corner entrance, also with bulgy columns, under a turret. Much carved relief decoration." \_\_\_\_\_ *Pevsner, "South Lancashire" (1969)*

**TOXTETH (1900-02)** "Red brick and stone trim. Symmetrical to Windsor Street, with two big Venetian windows under gables with obelisks, the main entrance with a far-projecting hood. Small cupola above. Two more Venetian windows to Upper Parliament Street. The former reading room (north side) contains a mural by W. Alison Martin and Clinton Balmer, an allegory with Knowledge enthroned; also a copper plaque in Celtic Art Nouveau style by C. E. Thompson, commemorating the opening by Andrew Carnegie." \_\_\_\_\_ *Sharples, "Liverpool" (2004)*

**WAVERTREE (1902-03)** "Red brick and much stone. One of three public buildings built by Liverpool Corporation with Shelmerdine façades after Wavertree was absorbed into the city. This one is symmetrical, the details C17 to C18 as usual. Gabled wings with big windows, tripartite with a tripartite lunette above. The lower part has alternately blocked Ionic pilasters for mullions. Single-storey porch with segmental hood in the centre, with a balustrade above it and a recessed semicircular gable behind that. A very enjoyable little building."

\_\_\_\_\_ *Pollard & Pevsner, "Lancashire: Liverpool and the South-West" (2006)*

**TUE BROOK (Green Lane Carnegie Library, Stanley) (1904-05)** "A corner composition with a pretty little turret and C17 windows. Red brick and stone dressings." \_\_\_\_\_ *Pevsner, "South Lancashire" (1969)*

**GARSTON (1908)** "This is one of the last of Shelmerdine's charming branch libraries and unmistakably shows the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement. It is symmetrical and has a big central gable with a window, and little half-timbered gablets left and right breaking through a low-stooping roof. Canted bays rise up through the eaves beneath the gablets. There is another of these to each side elevation. The walls are rendered except for the red ashlar centre, which breaks forward slightly. The most striking motif is the battered buttresses at the corners and the corners of the ashlar projection. Inside are three parallel spaces with segmental-vaulted ceilings, separated by arcades. The central space is taller with narrow galleries around it. The beaten copper plaque by C. E. Thompson commemorating the opening is a lovely thing." \_\_\_\_\_ *Pollard, "Lancashire: Liverpool and the South-West" (2006)*

**SEFTON PARK (1911)** "The last of the branch libraries designed by the Corporation Surveyor, Thomas Shelmerdine. Ashlar and roughcast on the ground floor with half-timbering above, and tall, diagonally set brick chimneys - like a Neo-Tudor village hall. In the entrance porch, a repoussé copper panel commemorating the opening by Andrew Carnegie, Celtic Art Nouveau style, by J. A. Hodel." \_\_\_\_\_ *Sharples, "Liverpool" (2004)*

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#### ----- Secretary Annette Butler reports –

- The Charles Dickens Bicentenary means that many celebrations are planned for the February birth date onwards, especially in London and Kent. Our own event will take place in the latter part of the year – date and details in the next Newsletter.
- Increasing costs of coach hire, plus relative lack of support for some recent excursions will mean the probability of smaller vehicles (35 or even 24-27 seaters). Please book as early as possible to enable us to anticipate demand.
- An attractive membership-joining leaflet, outlining the aims of the Victorian Society nationally, is available for forwarding to HQ Priory Gardens. We would appeal to members who are able to distribute leaflets to other groups, libraries, churches etc., to take a batch from our Quaker Meeting House sessions. We need to increase our profile.

#### IN MEMORIAM

ANN NUGENT and AUDREY HIRST. Members and regular attenders at our activities over many years, the two old friends died within a short time of each other. Ann died aged 72 in August, then the slightly older Audrey - following protracted illness.

PETER SAUNDERS. Peter had been a most informed and lively journalist on the 'Liverpool Daily Post'. He was 78, but recent poor health had not deterred him (with his wife Sheila) from enthusiastic attendance at last season's talks.

COLIN CUNNINGHAM (1942-2011). Members will have seen Geoff Brandwood's fine tribute to Colin in the current 'Victorian'. Always a good friend of this Group, he gave a lecture in 2005 for the centenary of Alfred Waterhouse's death, and only last year led a most informed tour of the Eaton and Tatton Estates.

Our sympathy to all their families.

## PRE-RAPHAELITE NEWS

Fiona MacCarthy opened Manchester Art Gallery's exhibition, **FORD MADOX BROWN: PRE-RAPHAELITE PIONEER** in September, but this exceptional collection is open until 29 JANUARY 2012. (The Gallery is open Tuesday to Sunday, 10am - 5pm. Entry is £8/£6 concessions.) In addition, Manchester Town Hall murals by Ford Madox Brown will be accessible on the following Sundays (10am-5pm): December 4, 11, 18; January 8, 15, 22, 29. The exhibition subsequently moves to Ghent, Brown having been trained in Belgium.

Curator Julian Treuherz, former Director of the Walker Art Gallery, originally worked at Manchester Art Gallery as Keeper of Fine Art. His impressive exhibitions have included 'Hard Times: Social Realism in Victorian Art', 'Alma Tadema', 'Rossetti' and 'Art in the Age of Steam'. His "Victorian Painting" (Thames & Hudson, 1993) has this to say on the Manchester exhibition's subject:-

"Though Ford Madox Brown never joined the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, he was closely involved in the movement, sharing and contributing to its evolution, and later in turn learning from its members... Brown's 'The Pretty Baa Lambs', a pastoral in C18th costume, along with Millais's 'Ophelia' and Hunt's 'The Hireling Shepherd', marked a new stage in the pursuit of truth to nature at the Academy's 1852 Summer Exhibition... The first modern-life subject by a member of the Brotherhood had been shown at the Academy in 1850. Brown was to paint an emigration picture, 'The Last of England' (1855), and a social statement on an epic scale, 'Work' (1852-65), in which he made a group of common navvies digging for drains the heroes of his picture, placing them at the centre of a panorama of contemporary types..." These key paintings are among the 140 in the Manchester show, 'Work' being the first Pre-Raphaelite painting bought (in 1885) by the Gallery.

\* \* \*

"THE LAST PRE-RAPHAELITE: EDWARD BURNE-JONES AND THE VICTORIAN IMAGINATION" by Fiona MacCarthy (Faber 2011; ISBN 9780571228614). "MacCarthy is the author of an admirable biography of William Morris, and she offers an excellent account of why these two very different men became such close friends. She is also acute on Burne-Jones's somewhat two-edged relationship with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the inner circle of the pre-Raphaelites. She is rather less successful in explaining the charisma of the two other formative influences on Burne-Jones's imagination: the brooding critic John Ruskin and the flame-haired poet Algernon Charles Swinburne..." \_\_\_\_\_Jonathan Bate, 'The Spectator', 17.09.11

Fiona MacCarthy, now a Vice-President of the Victorian Society, has an excellent article on 'Burne-Jones and the Victorian interior' in the current (November) issue of 'The Victorian'. That article is followed by two further pieces on the artist (by Martin Harrison and Peter Cormack) which will be of interest to all who have been mesmerised by our Group's John Dewsnap's brilliant analysis of work at All Hallows, Allerton, and elsewhere.

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"For this show (ALICE IN WONDERLAND, at Tate Liverpool, until 29 JANUARY) really comes into its own when the focus narrows right down to Carroll himself, from the extraordinary photographs he made of Alice Liddell and her sisters dreaming, sleeping, halfway through the mirror as it seems, to the paintings he owned and the artists, from Rossetti to Millais to Arthur Hughes, who inspired him." \_\_\_\_\_Laura Cumming, 'The Observer', 06.11.11

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In the 'Observer' (12.09.10), Stephen Wildman, Director of the Ruskin Library, Lancaster University (which the Group visited in 2009), voted these as the 10 best Pre-Raphaelite paintings:- 1. Millais, 'Isabella' (1848-49); 2. Hughes, 'The Long Engagement' (1859); 3. Wallis, 'Chatterton' (1855-56); 4. Millais, 'Christ in the House of his Parents' (1849-50); 5. Millais, 'Ophelia' (1851-52); 6. Burne-Jones, 'Laus Veneris' (1873-75); 7. Hunt, 'The Light of the World' (1851-53); 8. Rossetti, 'The Blue Bower' (1865); 9. Brown, 'The Last of England' (1852-55); 10. Brown, 'An English Autumn Afternoon, Hampstead' (1852-55).

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Ten years ago Julian Treuherz lectured to us about the Birkenhead banker and Pre-Raphaelite patron George Rae, friend of Brown and Rossetti. The Rae family were Anglicans and attended St Saviour's Church, Oxton, where the fine West Window with Burne-Jones designs is a fitting memorial to him. The church was last visited by our Group in 2001; like ourselves it will benefit from the late Hazel Turnbull's generosity (see page 9).

# COMMENTARY

It will be tempting for Liverpool Group members to turn to the index of Susie Harries's superb biography of Nikolaus Pevsner to check references to our illustrious co-founder Edward Hubbard. And indeed there's an entertaining account of what Pevsner described as 'the Prenton General Services Unlimited', which included Mrs Hubbard's preparation of sandwiches carefully wrapped and labelled for each day of the week ahead, the dates decided by the keeping properties of the contents, when Ted and he were off to hotels on their tour of South Lancashire. The surreality is increased when the two found themselves in the same Bolton hotel as Jayne Mansfield "who electrified the room with her imposing bosom". Jonathan Meades has sagely commented that "Mrs Harries's descriptions of the journeys undertaken for the 'Buildings of England' are a hoot, as enchanting in their way as the magnificent opus those journeys produced: if only Arthur Lowe were alive to play Nikolaus in the film of the book".

This though is the light relief in a serious study of a deeply complex man, full of contradictions which place him far beyond the childish Betjeman/Piper caricatures of Teutonic pedantry. While ultimately Pevsner was to re-invent himself as a modestly social-democratic Englishman (a politically unengaged Labour voter), his 1930 visit to Britain on behalf of Göttingen University did not particularly excite him. Amusingly his visit to our area led to a critical put-down of Chester, "famous as the best preserved medieval town in England, but you couldn't compare it with Württemberg", adjusted in 1970 (with Ted) to "Chester is not a medieval, it is a Victorian city, the magpie façades jingling away too insistently". And at Port Sunlight he informed his wife Lola "the picture gallery is enough to make you laugh your head off, crammed with the worst 19th-century painting imaginable; one can have enough of the Pre-Raphaelites and their successors, who are worse". Ironically it was the Leverhulme Trust which would rescue "The Buildings of England" while Ted was to write the thorough 1970 piece on Lever and the village. But Susie Harries reports how forty years earlier Pevsner "sobered up fast enough when he reached Liverpool, which he described as a hilly, sooty city with an interesting layout and a starkly defined gap between rich and poor, between neoclassical public buildings and crumbling tenements and factories".

What really disturbs at this early age are Pevsner's intense nationalist sentiments, in reaction to his mother, his Jewish background and the liberal anarchy of the Weimar Republic, which made him (under the influence of his great art history tutor Wilhelm Pinder with his goal of identifying the 'Weltanschauung') something of a National Socialist sympathiser. Stephen Games has - not without controversy - tilled this ground (June 2010 Newsletter), now Susie Harries sensitively spells it out. Given the grotesque horrors of inter-war Germany, it is offensive to play at being holier-than-thou; it still has to be said that Pevsner's loathing of 'art for art's sake' led him dangerously close to Goebbels in those years before his ideologies brought him to the somewhat gentler territory of William Morris. Much later, fully acknowledging the nightmare of Hitler's Germany, he was anxious not to be grouped with genuine anti-Nazi refugees (Gombrich among them) since his own ideal career would have been academic teaching in German universities, a project only derailed by the racist policies which ignored his conversion to Lutheranism.

Pevsner's permanent move to England from 1933 was accompanied by much homesickness with the war period especially traumatic, his concerns now for the devastations suffered by both Germany (Leipzig, his home town, and Dresden where he had worked) and Britain (where he had had dramatic spells firewatching and rubble shovelling). There were no lingering illusions about the National Socialists with his daughter dangerously stranded in Germany and his mother committing suicide for fear of imminent deportation to the extermination camps. But on the work front there was that ceaseless activity which was increasingly to be of benefit to ourselves, including publication of "Pioneers of the Modern Movement, from William Morris to Walter Gropius", "An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England", and "An Outline of European Architecture". The latter was commissioned by Allen Lane at Penguin, a meeting that was eventually to lead to "The Buildings of England" and "The Pelican History of Art". Pevsner's immense energies also embraced regular broadcasting, prolific lecturing (including launching our own Group from the St George's Concert Hall in January 1965 and launching "Cheshire" with Ted at Chester in October 1971), editing the influential 'Architectural Review', and - lest we forget! - very active chairmanship of the infant Victorian Society. (Why isn't his statue beside Betjeman's in St Pancras?)

Inevitably in later years there were challenges to his methodology and belief in the 'Zeitgeist'. Susie Harries deals with these very fairly, pointing out that David Watkin's lacerating "Architecture and Morality" (1977) makes the same kind of sweeping generalisations of which he accuses Pevsner. Watkin was undoubtedly effective in highlighting Pevsner's emotional subjectivity in his commitment to the International Modern as the spirit of the age. But Reyner Banham, that most paradoxical of Pevsner pupils, defended the Professor by accusing Watkin of "a



kind of vindictiveness of which only Christians seem capable"! Stephen Bayley, Lionel Brett, Charles Jencks, Andrew Saint and Richard Wollheim were critical too of Watkin's thesis, while John Betjeman, Joe Mordaunt Crook, Ernst Gombrich, Paul Johnson, Osbert Lancaster, Karl Popper and John Summerson all expressed support for the ideas in "Architecture and Morality".

The tragedy is that this lively debate surrounded a remarkable man who was now in poor health, with Parkinson's disease having been diagnosed at much the same time as for John Betjeman. Pevsner died on 18 August 1983, in the same week as the much younger Ian Nairn who had worked with him on "Surrey" and "Sussex", and who (like Betjeman) had written a most moving letter to Nikolaus on the death of his Lola twenty years before. The summation in Susie Harries's biography is itself exceptionally moving, starting with a quote from Alec Clifton-Taylor, Pevsner's oldest friend, who gave the funeral address. "A good man?" she asks. "To the students, colleagues and friends who valued his intellectual generosity, his dedication, his kindness and his integrity, that is precisely what he was. Again, Pevsner did not believe it... He was unquestionably a friend to England, and he was also a lover of England, though not exclusively and 'not quite in the English way'... Pevsner, the bringer of riches." On our own local level it is possible to endorse these sentiments with Jack Hubbard, Ted's genial father, always delighted to recall Nikolaus's happy stay in Osmaston Road, Prenton, Birkenhead.

*Susie Harries, "Nikolaus Pevsner - The Life", Chatto & Windus 2011 (ISBN 9780701168391)*

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To think of "The Buildings of England" as fully objective listings is to misunderstand them. Such objectivity is both impossible and undesirable. Pevsner was incapable of being merely bland and was always aware of the imperfections and limitations of his fabulous initial 'reconnaissance'. On "Cheshire" he worked with Ted Hubbard; now, forty years later, we have an expanded volume, largely respecting the old boundaries, from Clare Hartwell and Matthew Hyde. Input is acknowledged from among others Peter Howell (whose editing of Ted Hubbard's "The Work of John Douglas" is being reprinted by the Victorian Society for Douglas's centenary year, thanks to a generous legacy from our local member Hazel Turnbull), Peter de Figueiredo (with reference to his useful analysis of Leasowe's pioneer solar school), David Watkin (on Chorlton Hall), Geoff Brandwood (on Austin & Paley), Michael Shippobottom (on Lever's villages), Miles Broughton (on Birkenhead architects), and Joseph Sharples.

The new volume's strength is in an evocation of place, a strength which Pevsner modestly felt he lacked when he paid tribute to Ian Nairn. Matthew Hyde is self-evidently more enthusiastic about Chester than was Sir Nikolaus. There are now 75 pages on the City as opposed to 45 in the 1971 edition. And Matthew, an expert on Richard Harding Watt, while acknowledging Pevsner's patronising attitude to this wayward genius ("remorseless imposing of crazy grandeur on poor Knutsford"), analyses the work more sympathetically and in greater detail. The Nantwich entry wonderfully encapsulates Clare Hartwell's own sense of discovery. Runcorn New Town can now be more fully explored, with assistance from Elaine Harwood. The Sandiway entry repeats the error that John Douglas (born there in 1830) was 'lord of the manor'.

Inevitably readers will respond according to their own aesthetic enthusiasms. I would have appreciated some opinion on Jellicoe's landscaping for the Moreton biscuit factory, more than just the one extra line on Jagger's West Kirby War Memorial, and perhaps an acknowledgment of Bebington's post-war council-housing - but these are the merest quibbles. Better to conclude with Christopher Howse's verdict ('Daily Telegraph' website, 24.09.11): "Some of us look forward to a new volume of Pevsner as we once did a birthday postal-order. For the 60th anniversary of the 'Buildings of England' series, it's 'Cheshire'. I set off clutching it for the treat of test-driving, or test-cycling it, in the Wirral... In choosing a theme for a two-day ramble I bore in mind something that Susie Harries says in her tremendous new biography. Pevsner was keenly aware of his lack of evocation of the village groupings of buildings - natural or planned - in England 'to which the Continent has no parallel', he wrote. 'If only my volumes allowed me more space.' Well, the new volume has more space. So I went to look at Port Sunlight, where even in the 1971 edition Pevsner had benefited from the expertise of Edward Hubbard... the village looked better [than my expectations]. Why? I think the explanation in the new volume is right, the new volume making up for Pevsner's deficiency in considering 'grouping' of buildings."

*Hartwell, Hyde, Hubbard and Pevsner, "Cheshire" The Buildings of England, Yale University Press 2011 (ISBN 978 0 300 170436)*

Graham Fisher



## THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY

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