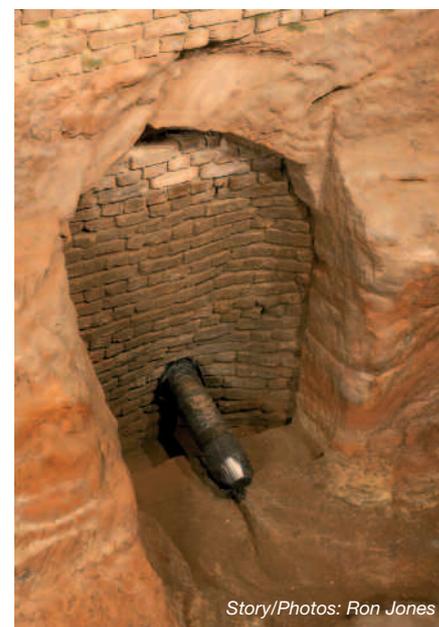




Liverpool's New Window on the Past



Story/Photos: Ron Jones

If ever Liverpool, in its 800-year history had a 'lightbulb moment', it was that day 300 years ago when the Town Council decided to construct an enclosed commercial wet dock. As it turned out, it was a 'first' not only for the town but for the world.

From May, for the first time in over 180 years, you will be able to have a grandstand view looking down not only on part of the revolutionary Old Dock but also the bed of the Pool, the creek that gave Liverpool its very name.

The Old Dock was discovered during excavations for the Liverpool ONE development in 2001 and became the subject of a special Channel Four *Time Team* programme that year.

Grosvenor developers have preserved the dock, incorporated it into the design for Liverpool ONE and, in partnership with Oxford Archaeology North, National Museums Liverpool and the North West Development Agency, have developed a visitor facility – *The Old Dock Experience* – that is fitting for our World Heritage City and is bound to fascinate Society members.

The most striking feature is the walls of the Old Dock, fashioned out of hand-made bricks and rising more than 20 feet from the sandstone bed of the Pool. Also on view (see photo above right) is an ancient bricked-up tunnel set into the dock wall. It is thought that this pre-dates the dock by hundreds of years and may have been a link between the Pool and Liverpool Castle in medieval times. A drain made out of yew with a wooden bung

in the end, probably used to drain water from the tunnel, can also be seen in the photograph.

For the first 500 years of its life the growth of Liverpool was painfully slow. Ships would unload their cargoes in the river or wait until low tide before being beached on the shore. Unloading a ship could take up to two weeks. At the time the dock was commissioned the port was handling less than 15,000 tons of shipping each year.

The 'New Dock' (as it was then known), designed by Thomas Steers to handle up to 100 ships and opened in 1715, changed everything. Ships could be unloaded in a day and were no longer at the vagaries of the tides or weather. The first ship in the dock was the *Mulberry*, owned by Bryan Blundell of Bluecoat fame.

This was the true birth of Liverpool as a maritime city. Over the course of the next two centuries, the original 3.5 acres of dock grew 100 times into 396 acres. 376,000 tons of shipping in 1715 rocketed to 14 million tons by 1905. The population grew from around 5,000 until it nudged the one million mark. And in the course of this meteoric rise, Liverpool left behind its old rivals of Chester and Bristol to become the second most important port in the entire British Empire.

Free public tours begin on 4th May and take place every Tuesday thereafter. Tours depart from the Maritime Museum with a trained guide and must be booked in advance by calling 0151 478 4296.

13 December 2009 – Helen Robinson, National Museums Liverpool

MUSEUM OF LIVERPOOL

Community consultation co-ordinator Helen Robinson has been holding a series of meetings, such as this one, to tell people about plans for the new Museum of Liverpool and get them involved with some of the decisions about what will go on display there.

Helen treated us to an illustrated report on the progress of the Museum. First, she asked us what sort of objects we would hope to see there, and then proceeded to show us how well our hopes will be realised when it opens. The building was on schedule to be handed over for fitting out by the beginning of 2010 with the first phase opening in March 2011. It was planned that phases 2 and 3 would open in July and November 2011, respectively.

The museum is to consist of four major galleries centred on the themes of Port City; Global City; People's City; and Creative City. The museum was aiming to display 6,000 objects. Every gallery would have permanent, special and 'in-focus' exhibitions. The display spaces are designed to be flexible and easily up-datable. 'Little Liverpool' would cater specially for children under six. Indeed, 'people' appeared to be at the centre of the new museum with strong community content, people telling their stories, Liverpool achievers in various fields etc.

The museum will have its own theatre which will screen a 25-minute film telling the story of Liverpool through the ages as an introduction for visitors to the museum and indeed Liverpool. This space would also be used for other events, including theatre.

Two of the largest exhibits will be the famous 1838 *Lion* steam loco and an actual carriage from the much-missed Liverpool Overhead Railway - this will be suspended above the gallery on tracking to suggest its operating height - and visitors will be able to sit in it and reminisce about the old days.



New kid on the block. The Museum of Liverpool is now being fitted out ready for its March 2011 opening. © Photo Ron Jones

The 'Creative City' gallery promises to be popular and will deal with themes such as The Beatles and the Merseybeat era, Liverpool writers and poets and sport including, of course, football. Helen told us that here there would be a number of 'Immersives' which will give visitors a flavour of what it was like to be a Beatle fan or a soccer fan. These 'immersives' would be ticket areas where visitors would spend 15-20 minutes.

The People's Gallery would embrace such social themes as human rights, good health, unemployment, education and housing – the original intention to reconstruct Ringo's birthplace had been abandoned and instead there would be a reconstruction of old court housing.

As Helen concluded her fascinating insight into the work in progress and the delights in store for us in the new Museum of Liverpool, our members bombarded her with questions and comments.

Meeting report: Mary Harrison

21 February 2010 – Peter Bingham

THE SCRAPPING OF THE GREAT EASTERN AT TRANMERE SHORE

Peter Bingham, who has enjoyed an interesting life as a singer with the King's College and the BBC Northern Choirs, and as a sailor and teacher, has a passionate interest in the history of the "Great Eastern", especially her final years. He has trawled through national archives and libraries, and even came across the music for "The Great Eastern Polka," but has not been able to find very much about the breaking up of this wonderful ship at Tranmere. His research continues.

He enthralled us with the fascinating history of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's last brainchild. She was first known as "The Leviathan", and was the largest movable object ever built until the launch of the *Lusitania* nearly 50 years later. The statistics are breathtaking: length 693 feet, two paddles and gigantic engines (the largest ever built); built from 10,000 tons of iron plates, every one of which had to be specially moulded. She carried huge sails on six masts named after the days of the week. She was designed to take mail to India, and would have been well suited to the task, because she could carry enough coal to steam 22,000 miles without refuelling. However, the contract was awarded to P & O Steam Navigation Co.

Brunel fell out with the builders, who went bankrupt over the job. His ship was finally launched, sideways, in 1857, but during a final inspection after the ship had been fitted out Brunel suffered a stroke. During the first trial voyage, there was a huge explosion which killed six men and badly injured a similar number. The captain showed great courage and resource, and managed to bring her in to port. The news was too much for Brunel to take and he suffered a second stroke a few days later which proved fatal. (What Peter did not mention, was that the first Master was a great and popular Commander from the Liverpool Cunard Line, Captain William Harrison. While the ship was in winter quarters being repaired, Captain Harrison was drowned while sailing from ship to shore. He was buried in St. James's Cemetery, Liverpool and his grave can still be found there. See story in our 2005 Journal).



Death of a Leviathan. The Great Eastern is towed to her final resting place. It took 200 men one year to break her up. One of the greatest thrills for many of our members was to hold one of the 3 million enormous rivet heads used in her construction. (Image: Ron Jones collection)

Peter told us of her maiden voyage to New York when 150,000 people flocked to see her. Although she could carry 4,000 passengers, only 100 returned on her voyage from New York to England. The War Office chartered her to carry troops to Canada during the American Civil War, sailing from Liverpool with 2,100 soldiers on board. On her third trip to New York she struck a huge rock (still known as The Great Eastern Rock) and suffered a gash 83 feet long by 9 feet wide, but her double hull saved her and she survived and reached harbour. But she could not compete financially, and in 1864 was sold at auction for just £25,000 (she cost £750,00 to build) and used, very successfully, to lay telegraphic cables under the oceans.

She was involved in many ventures, but in 1874, her glory days were over, she was laid up in Milford Haven. Twelve years later she was bought for £22,000 by Edward de Mattos, and later leased to Louis S. Cohen, owner of Lewis's store and Lord Mayor of Liverpool who planned to use her as an entertainment palace. With great difficulty she was patched up, and sailed at an average of five knots – the ship had been designed to steam at 20 knots! She was moored in the Mersey with her sides painted with advertisements for Lewis's. Thousands welcomed her. Queen Victoria came to open the show, but as it was a stormy day, she did not go on board. Performers of every description entertained the visitors. On one Bank Holiday, 14,000 people were carried to her by seven ferryboats. By the time Mr de Mattos decided to take her on to Dublin, over half a million people had paid to go on board. One local architect wrote that he thought Isambard Kingdom Brunel would have been heartbroken.

There was a successful Summer season in the Liffey, and then she was sold for £25,000. To this day she is still the largest vessel ever to have entered the Liffey. Peter said de Mattos was probably the only owner who did not lose money. There was a failed attempt to refit the ship to carry produce to Australia and a short Summer season on the Clyde. She was finally sold in 1888 to metal merchants Henry Bath and Son, Liverpool, for £16,000, and returned ignominiously to the Mersey where she was beached at New Ferry and sold in bits, raising a total of £58,000. One mast was bought as a flagpole by Liverpool Football club, said Peter, and is still in use at the ground. Later one of our members said it couldn't have been Liverpool FC because they were not formed until after that date. As our Chairman remarked, only in Liverpool could such a history be concluded with a discussion about football!

Meeting report: Netta Dixon and Mary Harrison

21 March 2010 – Dereck Arnold

HMS THETIS

Dereck Arnold, whose father, Leading Stoker Walter Arnold, was one of only four men to escape from the ill-fated *Thetis* submarine, had us frozen with horror as he recounted the tragic happenings of that day, 1st June, 1939. *Thetis* was the first of the T-class submarines, built at Cammel Laird's shipyard as war loomed that year. The first trial run to Scotland revealed several faults, so she returned to Laird's for adjustments, including the painting of the inside of the torpedo tubes with bitumastic.

On Thursday 1st June, attended by the elderly tug, *Grebcock*, she started a second trial in Liverpool Bay, with a crew of 53 plus 50 other interested parties, including 25 Laird's employees. At 2pm her captain, Commander Bolus, signalled to Lt. Coulthard aboard *Grebcock*, 'Diving for three hours'. But submersion proved difficult and she spent an hour 'thrashing about on the surface' before finally submerging very rapidly.

On board *Thetis* Commander Bolus realised the trim was wrong and ordered Lt Woods to inspect the torpedo tubes, as balance had been calculated on 5 and 6 tubes being full of water to compensate for the absent torpedoes. The inner doors of the torpedo tubes had a safety feature, a test cock, which would show the crew whether the tube was full of water or empty. Unfortunately, when the tube was painted the test cock had been blocked and painted over so no water was revealed. Lt Woods decided to open the tube. The outer door was open and seawater rushed into the Torpedo Room. The crew abandoned it for the next compartment, but the watertight door did not close properly behind them, so they were forced to abandon this one also and exit to the third compartment, where they successfully closed the watertight door as the ship hit the sea bed 160 ft below. Lt Woods made three heroic attempts to enter the flooded area through the escape chamber, but the water pressure at that depth was too great. The shipbuilders proposed altering pipes to pump out water and fuel to lighten ship. By morning they had pumped out 50 tons of liquid and the stern floated up above the surface.

Escapes could begin. The main fear now was running out of oxygen. With a normal crew of 53, the air would last for 36 hours, but there were 103 on board, so they had just 18 hours. Captain Oram and Lt Woods went first, successfully. Then, as the air was rapidly running out, it was decided to risk four at once. The confined space and the steep angle made it impossible and all four died. Leading Stoker Arnold and Laird's Frank Shaw were next to go. We shivered with the pair as the water crept up over them. To conserve air they could not don the primitive oxygen masks until the water reached their mouths. Then they both grasped the hatch control and, with superhuman effort, they opened it and were swept up to the surface. But it was already too late for the 99 still below.



Leading Stoker Walter Arnold

When *Thetis* did not resurface after the planned three hours, Lt Coulthard on board *Grebcock* had done his best to get help. Via the primitive pre-war communication systems he had sent a signal to Portsmouth at 4.50pm designed to sound alarm bells – 'What was the duration of *Thetis*' dive?'. It had the desired effect but the message did not arrive until 6.15pm. A series of errors and red tape resulted in not finding *Thetis* until 7.50am next day, 18 hours after the dive. Two marine salvage firms had offered their services, but the Admiralty refused help. Not until two days later did HMS *Vigilant* arrive. Attempts to raise *Thetis* failed; she was gone.

The aftermath was equally chilling. The survivors were silenced under the Official Secrets Act. It took three months to raise the *Thetis*. She was beached at Red Wharf Bay, Anglesey, and most of the men were buried in a mass grave at Hollyhead. The families were awarded compensation, but it was doled out begrudgingly in small amounts. Dereck had warned us that we would be appalled, and we certainly were. *Thetis* was eventually refitted and, re-named HMS *Thunderbolt*, served with some success in the 2nd World War before being sunk in the Mediterranean on 14 March 1943... chillingly, with the loss of another 99 souls.

Meeting report: Mary Harrison

LIVERPOOL HISTORY SOCIETY – 2010 MEETINGS PROGRAMME

16 May	What was the Liverpool & Manchester Railway really for?	Adrian Jarvis
20 Jun	Visit to the Victoria Building, Brownlow Hill, Liverpool	Anne-Marie Clarke
19 Sep	History of Maghull Chapel	Eileen Kermode
17 Oct	Huyton Aliens Internment Camp in 1940	Jennifer Taylor
21 Nov	'Modernise Everything': Thomas Shelmerdine, Liverpool Architect (Joint LHS/Historic Society of Lancashire & Cheshire meeting)	John Tiernan
19 Dec	Curiosities of Liverpool	Ken Pye

With the exception of 20 June, all meetings will take place in the Grace Room, 1st Floor, Hope at Everton, Shaw St., Liverpool. This is the former St Francis Xavier College building. All meetings start at 2pm (doors open 1.30pm).

Snippets

- Mike Brian gave notice some months ago of his intention to relinquish his position as Treasurer, a role he has fulfilled for many years. Happily he has had a change of heart and has decided to soldier on – many thanks Mike!
- It's that time of the year again. Annual subscriptions are now due so could you please pay Mike either in person at the next LHS meeting or by post to the Treasurer's address below.
- Sadly, the death of Bob Wright is reported. Bob was a very keen Crosby historian and the driving force behind the the Little Crosby Museum and Little Crosby's success in 'Village in Bloom'.

Bookshelf

Just when you thought that her numerous books had told you all you could possibly want to know about Liverpool's nearby Lancastrian neighbour, Ormskirk, Mona Duggan has produced a new volume (her tenth?) on the town. *Ormskirk Through Time* is essentially a photographic 'before and after' meander through Moor Street, Church Street, Burscough Street and other streets in this ancient market town.

Evocative sepia photographs give us a glimpse of what life was like in the late 19th and first half of the 20th century. New colour photographs by Dennis Walton, often taken from the same vantage point as the old ones, provide a fascinating counterpoint. And more often than not it is for the worse. Characterful Victorian buildings, ancient inns and arcaded

- Our thanks go to Rob Ainsworth and Cynthia Stonall for manning the Society's stand at the Wirral Heritage and History Fair held at Birkenhead Town Hall on 6 March. The Society also had a stand at the Big History Weekend at St George's Hall on 20 March. As a result, a number of new Members were signed up.



Stopping off at the LHS stand, the Mayor of Wirral and Bruce Laird meet LHS member/author Harry McLeish.

shop have, in the name of 'progress', succumbed to charmless redevelopment. A good example is the photograph of the King's Arms which once dominated the centre of Ormskirk but was demolished in the 1950's. An 'after' photograph shows its bland replacement housing ubiquitous Dorothy Perkins and Boots shops.

On a brighter note, Mona's book also has strong human interest appeal with portraits of Ormskirk firemen and cyclists and others through the years. The photograph of the trim and very smartly turned out waitresses of Swift's Café in Moor Street is particularly charming.

Ormskirk Through Time by Monica Duggan. £12.99. 96pp. Full colour paperback. Amberley Publishing. ISBN 978 1 84868 674 8.

THE SOCIETY'S OFFICERS & COMMITTEE 2009-10

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Administration Secretary: Jo McCann (P) (2010)
Treasurer/Acting Membership Secretary: Michael Brian (P) (2010)
Programme Secretary & Webmaster: Rob Ainsworth (P) (2010)

Committee

Sheila Binks (2012) Joyce Culling (2012) Netta Dixon (2010) Mary Harrison (2010) Brenda Murray (2010) Cynthia Stonall (2012) Marie McQuade (P) (2012) Kathy Donaldson
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