



HISTORY SOCIETY

WINTER 2012/13

**Cotton on to this story of a great Liverpool trade**

The Liverpool-based International Cotton Association, formerly the Liverpool Cotton Association, has brought to the Society's attention a new history of cotton section on its website – [www.ica-ltd.org/about-us/our-history](http://www.ica-ltd.org/about-us/our-history)

Taking the form of a history timeline which runs from the beginning of the 18th century to the present day, it is a story in four parts: 1757-1829 (From small beginnings to an industrial revolution); 1830-1913 (The golden years); 1914-1938 (Difficult times) and 1939-2012 (The end of an era and a new global outlook). The website is a joy to use and is an object lesson in how a history website should be constructed. It will be of huge benefit to the historian, layman, and indeed anybody wishing to find out about this major industry dominated by Liverpool since 1795, the year it overtook London as the leading British cotton importer. The first small cargo of cotton arrived in the port in 1709. At its peak, just before the start of the First World War, over five million bales of cotton arrived in Liverpool in one twelve month period.

However, there are a number of omissions that I believe the ICA should address. The cotton trade of both America and the West Indies was built on the toil of African slaves, with an estimated one million of them transported across the Atlantic in Liverpool ships alone. Liverpool's domination of the slave trade and the vigorous opposition of her merchants and politicians to its abolition is a well-known story. All the more curious therefore that this aspect seems to have been completely air-brushed out of the story of Liverpool's cotton trade.



And, whilst much is made on the website of the exchange of letters between the Liverpool Cotton Brokers' Association and US Consul in Liverpool, Thomas H. Dudley, expressing outrage over the assassination of President Lincoln, no mention is made of the prominent part played by Liverpool's commercial interests in supporting the Confederate cause (and *ipso facto* slavery) throughout the American Civil War. And wasn't it that very same Consul Dudley who fumed – "No other city in Britain could with so much cause be accused of unofficially fighting on the side of the South during the War."?! For more information about Liverpool's links with the Civil War, see the report on Tom Sebrell's talk overleaf. (Editor)

**Europe's best urban street is in...Liverpool!**

Yes, it's official! Hope Street has been awarded the accolade of 'The best urban street in Europe' by the Academy of Urbanism. You know what it's like when you live in a place. You tend to take things for granted. But when you think what it has got going for it you can't help but agree that, yes, Hope Street really is a great street! How's this for starters?: two great 20th century cathedrals, the

Philharmonic Hall with its world-class orchestra, the Everyman and Unity Theatres and LIPA, the multi award-winning Hope Street Hotel, characterful pubs (including the splendid Philharmonic Dining Rooms) and numerous trendy restaurants. The street's also had a public realm makeover in recent years, making it much more pedestrian-friendly. Add to all that a vibrant events programme, which includes the Hope Street Feast, and some superb architecture and you can well understand why it came out on top.

**What a great gift idea!**

Stumped what to give a friend or relation for Christmas or their birthday, or simply as a way of saying "Thank you"? Recently a lady bought her mother and brother a surprise Christmas 'stocking filler' – a year's membership of the Liverpool History Society! And let's face it, for the sum of £10 there's little that could beat it for sheer value for money. Which prompted us to say: "What a brilliant idea!"

**Farewell Fred**

It is with some sadness that we report the passing of one of members, Fred Windsor. He had been unwell for some time and finally passed away peacefully on 6th September, aged 80 years. Fred had a great love of life and his smiling face will be sorely missed at our monthly meetings.



16 September 2012 – Colin Simpson

## DELLA ROBBIA POTTERY, BIRKENHEAD

Meeting report:  
Mary Harrison



Our Speaker was Colin Simpson, Director of Wirral's Williamson Art Gallery and Museum, which houses a large collection of Della Robbia pottery, made in Birkenhead between 1894 and 1906. Before he presented his well-illustrated talk on the history of the Della Robbia Company he told us that Peter Hyland's new book on Della Robbia will be out next year. The Williamson Art Gallery's Della Robbia collection is well worth seeing, although the period between 12th December and 13th January should be avoided as the gallery will be closed for refurbishment.

The Della Robbia Pottery was the brainchild of Harold Rathbone, a younger son of Philip Rathbone, Chairman of the Walker Art Gallery during the 19th century. Harold had always moved in artistic circles and a portrait of him by Holman Hunt is displayed in the Walker. He had studied at the Slade School of Fine Art, London, and worked as an assistant to Ford Maddox Brown. His ideas were influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement and the work of artist, textile designer and writer William Morris, author of the classic *News from Nowhere*. Morris transformed book illustration and his scrolling leaves and vines etc. can be seen in Della Robbia pottery.

The Della Robbia art pottery was an exciting venture in Birkenhead which had no history of pottery, although there had been a pottery in nearby Seacombe for twelve years and the Herculaneum Pottery had been important in Liverpool until 1840. Rathbone was an artist and draughtsman but not a sculptor, and he opened the pottery in 1894 in partnership with the sculptor Conrad Dressler. They also persuaded the Italian sculptor and potter, Giovanni Carlo Manzoni, to join them from London. Rathbone was an admirer of the Italian pottery which had been produced by the Florentine Della Robbia family since the 15th century. That pottery specialised in tin-glazed earthenware, particularly architectural panels for churches. The new company tried, unsuccessfully, to replicate these panels, so they turned to the production of large two-handled vases, beautiful plates and presentation ware.

They employed young people in line with the Art Nouveau ideal of innocence. In the early days, production by the young workforce was very much a learning process and the early pieces were – “Not brilliant; they were simple and geometric, designed by eye rather than ruler.” as Colin put it. But they certainly followed the Arts and Crafts Movement's ethic that they should look hand-made!

They adapted themes from nature and decorated the pottery with flowers, fruit and animals, including crocodile-shaped handles on vases, and they loved bright colours, particularly their trade mark shade of turquoise. Their colour palette of turquoise-green, and creams, yellows, browns and blues, and the fact that some 99% of the pottery's output had been marked with the company logo, a small sailing ship, between the letters D and R, often with the individual maker's initials, makes identification of Della Robbia pottery easier. Colin showed us many examples, including a pot featuring a sculpted Liver Bird, designed by Manzoni, and presented to Liverpool Town Hall, and a (“hideous”!) plaque presented to Queen Victoria to mark her Diamond Jubilee.

Manzoni left the company in 1895 to set up his Minerva Pottery, but returned in 1898 and remained there until the pottery closed. Dressler also didn't stay long with the company, leaving in 1897 to set up a pottery in the south of England. In 1900 the pottery merged with the Church Furnishing Co., to produce decorative panels for churches. In 1902 they took part in an exhibition in Cork and adopted many Gaelic designs. They had a showroom in Berry Street and their wares were also sold in a few Liverpool department stores but it seems that Della Robbia was largely ignored by the pottery world, and they gradually went out of fashion in the new Edwardian era. The Della Robbia Pottery and Marble Company, to give it its full title, finally closed in 1906.

In the 1960s interest in Victorian pottery caused Birkenhead's Della Robbia pottery to become popular and collectable once again and it remains so. Colin's talk proved to be very popular and sparked quite a flurry of interesting questions from our members.



*Della Robbia plaque in baptistry of St John's Church, Knotty Ash. Photo: Ron Jones.*

21 October 2012 – Thomas E Sebrell

## LIVERPOOL AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Meeting report:  
Netta Dixon

Who better to deliver a talk about Liverpool's links with the American Civil War than a real live American from the South? And so it was that Virginian Thomas E. Sebrell, armed with a degree from Virginia Military Institute and a PhD from Queen Mary College, London, gave his illustrated talk, with help from his Confederate flag-waving colleagues (and, incidentally, new LHS members) Lee Ruddin and David Hearn.

Dr. Sebrell explained why the Confederacy was so well supported in Liverpool and had such an influence on the merchants of the town, although there had been little support for America since the war of 1812. Britannia still ruled the waves between 1812 and 1861, when the Civil War broke out in America. In April 1861, seven states of the Deep South seceded from the Union to form the Confederate States of America. They formed a government with its own postal service, flags and diplomatic ambassadors, but they were not recognised by Britain. Although Lincoln said in his inaugural address that he was not going to interfere with slavery, the real problem was indeed the issue of slavery; there had been anti-slavery sentiment in the North since 1820. Slavery had been abolished in Britain in 1807 and in the British Empire in 1833. Lincoln was faced with the prospect of the destruction of the USA, and when four more States seceded, including Virginia, the Union blockade called “Scott's Great Snake” was created to prevent

the Confederacy from exporting cotton and tobacco to Europe. This was to have a disastrous effect on trade with Great Britain, particularly the Lancashire cotton industry, and resulted in enthusiastic support for the Confederacy in Liverpool, in spite of the Queen's Proclamation of Neutrality. The Confederates could not compete with the North as they had little industry or manufacturing of their own so they sent agents abroad to procure arms. An unofficial Confederate Embassy was opened in Rumford Place which masterminded the construction of blockade runners for the Confederate fleet.

Trading links between Liverpool and the South were already strong and Liverpool traders included J.H. Ashbridge, J.T. Robinson and Co, Harper and Co., A.B. Forwood, Leech Harrison, Samuel Smith, William Imrie, Alfred Holt, and the Anglo-Confederate Trading Co., run by Edward Lawrence (whose Liverpool-built blockade runner *Banshee* was very successful). Three out of four ships got through the blockade of Confederate ports.

Georgia-born James Dunwoody Bulloch came to Liverpool in June 1861 as naval representative of the Confederacy and commissioned John Laird to build the "290", or the *Enrica* for the Confederate navy; she was later renamed the CSS *Alabama*. She was fabulously successful during her two-year career from 1862-4 and sank or captured nearly seventy Yankee ships. Most of her crew were British, including some from Liverpool. The *Alabama* was finally sunk by the Federal cruiser *Kearsarge* in June 1864 off the French coast at Cherbourg.

President Lincoln's man in Liverpool, US Consul Thomas H. Dudley, who ran a huge espionage network from the city, was furious that so many local businesses favoured the Confederacy – the Chamber of Commerce were strong supporters and a Liverpool Southern Club was even set up. In 1864 a Confederate Bazaar was held in St. George's Hall in aid of the Southern Prisoners' Relief Fund; in five days they raised £20,000 (worth over £15m in today's money). The stalls were named after the various Southern states and were under the control of prominent ladies. Bulloch's wife was in charge of the Georgia stall and the South Carolina stall was manned by Mrs. Prioleau whose husband, Charles Kuhn Prioleau, was treasurer of the fund. He came to Liverpool in 1856 to work as a partner and manager for Fraser Trenholme and Co., and acted as the Confederate's banker here. He lived for a time with his family in the recently constructed 'mock Georgian' 19 Abercromby Square, now owned by Liverpool University. A number of Confederacy symbols can still be seen there.

Unaware that the war had ended on 9th May 1865, Commander James Waddell of the CSS *Shenandoah* had continued to prey on American whalers for some months before being told that the war had ended. Afraid of the consequences of surrendering to the Yankees he, amazingly, sailed 17,000 miles to surrender his ship in 'Confederate-friendly' Liverpool, making it the final act of the Civil War.

H.M. Government had to pay £3.5 million in compensation to the U.S.A., for the actions of British-built blockade runners such as the *Alabama*, *Florida* and *Banshee*. James Bulloch lived in Waterloo for a time; after the war he became a cotton trader, died in 1901 and was buried in Toxteth (his grave is marked by a stone which says "American by birth Englishman by choice"). Bulloch's nephew, future President, Theodore 'Teddie' Roosevelt, visited him in Liverpool.

It is understandable why the Confederacy received so much support in Liverpool, although Whitehall maintained its neutrality throughout the war. The war had disastrous consequences on the Lancashire mill towns, and Liverpool, as well as Glasgow and London, suffered economically from the blockade imposed on the Southern ports.



*The Laird-built 'Alabama' leaving the Mersey for her sea trials. From a painting courtesy of Edward D. Walker.*



Above left: Charles Prioleau's home at 19 Abercromby Square. It was said that Prioleau's wife, Mary, was the most beautiful woman in Liverpool. Illustrations of the Prioleau family adorn the ceiling in one of the rooms here. Above right: One of a number of plaques on 10 Rumford Place (and around its courtyard), once the unofficial Confederate 'embassy' in Britain.

Photographs: Ron Jones.

## 18 November 2012 – John Tiernan

### THE MAKING OF AN INSTITUTION – THE ATHENAEUM

Meeting report:  
Netta Dixon

In his talk, John described the development of the Institution's Library and the reason for the founding of the Athenaeum in 1797.

Liverpool had a distinguished history in the provision of libraries, commencing in 1715 with the Seamen's Library at the Parish Church of St Peter. In 1757, William Everard, a mathematician, schoolmaster and architect, created the Liverpool Library in his parlour in St Paul's Square and was its first librarian; in 1803, this library was re-established in Bold Street and became the Lyceum.

In or about 1785, the "Bates Hotel" at the junction of Lord Street with Whitechapel contained a coffee room and newsroom, supplied with newspapers and journals. When these establishments became too busy, a group of Liverpool merchants and businessmen, including Dr. James Currie, the Rev. William Shepherd and William Roscoe, proposed the creation of another newsroom in a new building which would contain a substantial reference library. A number of the founders were Unitarians. Following consultations and a public meeting, this institution was founded and named the Athenaeum; it was the first institution so named in the world. John Foster senior was appointed to design a building for the Athenaeum in Church Street, where it remained from its opening on the 22nd November 1797 until 1926/7 when it moved to its present building in Church Alley near the Bluecoat Chambers. It is one of the greatest proprietary libraries in the UK.

A prospectus was issued, a general meeting was held and a governing committee was established. In 1798, the post of librarian was created and the purchase of books worth £2,013 was agreed. Eminent people, including Sir Joseph Banks, advised on the

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## LIVERPOOL HISTORY SOCIETY: JAN-MARCH 2013

January	NO MEETING – WINTER BREAK	
17 February	The Importance of Liverpool to Dickens' Life	Steve Binns
17 March	History of the Bibby Line 1807-2012	Christina Spencer

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

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choice of books and a sub-committee, which included William Roscoe and Drs. James Rutter and John Rutter, selected books on Greek and Roman classics and works in modern European languages, as well as the transactions of various learned societies. The Parish of Liverpool deposited the manuscript return of the 1801 census, and the Corporation of Liverpool presented *The Atlantic Neptune*, two large rare folio volumes of naval charts of the North American coast. In 1802, the first printed catalogue of the library, containing entries of over 6,000 volumes, was published; by 1864, there were over 20,000 volumes.

The Athenaeum's membership included a number of town merchants and members of various religious denominations, including Unitarians, non-conformists, Jews and Anglicans, as well as a French Catholic émigré Fr. Jean Baptise Gerardot and Joseph Blanco White who presented Spanish theological works to the library; White ended his chequered ecclesiastical career as a Unitarian in Liverpool. One of the eminent founders was William Roscoe, the philanthropist, politician, banker, poet, botanist and opponent of the slave trade, who helped Audubon to publish his *Birds of America* but was unable to purchase these valuable books for the Athenaeum. Roscoe's original manuscript of *The Life and Pontificate of Leo the Tenth* in four large volumes, is in the Library's collection.



In 1820, William Roscoe was forced to sell his books and pictures as a result of his bankruptcy following the failure of the bankers Roscoe, Clarke and Roscoe. Fortunately, Roscoe's friends spent £600 at the auction of his books and William Rathbone presented them to the Athenaeum where they are housed in a fine glazed bookcase (pictured left). There are rare items, including the work which gained Henry VIII the title of 'Defender of the Faith' and examples of Roscoe's interest in botany. Unfortunately, one item, which was not purchased by Roscoe's friends was his copy of the first folio of Shakespeare's works; it sold for one guinea!

In the 19th century, the library acquired many items on history, topography, travel and printed maps, drawings and portraits, as well as the Brierley collection of drawings of Liverpool, which will be published in the near future, edited by David Brazendale. There is also a *Book of Hours* dating from 1517. First editions include the only genuine original copy of Gore's first directory of Liverpool published in 1766, Hannah Glasse's *The Art of Cookery* 1765, and the first edition of *Bradshaw's Railway Time Tables* 1839. Maps include atlases of England by John Speed and of the world by Johannes Blaeu and Gerardus Mercator; other treasures include the first edition of the Ordnance Survey 1832-53 and 22 volumes of Liverpool playbills for the period 1733-1830; there is also James Joyce's *Ulysses* 1923, a rare item printed on hand-made paper. In 1955, an unexpurgated edition of T.E. Lawrence's *The Mint* renowned at the time for containing much barrack room language was acquired without any protest, in spite of the committee's rejection of an erotic translation of the *Arabian Nights' Entertainment* (1885-6).

Sir James Allanson Picton helped to enhance the status of the librarian; Sir James was a proprietor in 1883 and Chairman of the Corporation's Libraries, Museums and Art Committee. The last full-time master librarian was Frederick Blair 1923-57. Since the 1970s retired professional librarians have provided expert cover; proprietors donate books and pay for valuable items to be repaired and rebound. Volunteers from NADFAS (National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies) spend several hours a week repairing books, maps and other artefacts. The Athenaeum now has two part-time cataloguers who are undertaking a modest form of computerisation helped by a number of proprietors. About 20,000 of the 60,000 volumes have been entered. John concluded by saying that the Athenaeum is the last example in Liverpool of a 'Gentleman's Club'. However, we learnt at question time, that women were admitted as proprietors in 1989, and there have been two chairwomen. The current Chief Executive is also a lady.

We learnt too that the Share Register contains the signatures of every proprietor since 1794; there are 500 proprietors and 500 associate members. In the Committee Room there is a box, which is used for the election of proprietors; white and yellow tokens are dropped into two holes in the box and those in the right-hand side are accepted as proprietors.

(Source notes provided by John Tiernan.)



**Chairman:** John Tiernan ● **Administration Secretary:** Fred Forrest (fred\_forrest@hotmail.com) ● **Membership Secretary:** Graham Jones, The Croft, Cropton, Pickering, North Yorkshire YO18 8HL ● **Programme Secretary:** Tony Melling (tony.melling@aol.co.uk) ● **Newsletter/Journal Editor:** Ron Jones (ron@rja-mpl.com) ● **Postal Correspondence:** Administration Secretary, 32 Rugby Drive, Aintree Village, Liverpool L10 8JU ● **LHS Email:** enquiries@liverpoolhistorysociety.org.uk ● **LHS Questions Blog:** <http://liverpoolhistorysocietyquestions.wordpress.com/> ● **Hon. Librarian:** Cynthia Stonall (cynthstonall@yahoo.co.uk) ● **Treasurer:** Tom Lacy ● **Webmaster:** POST VACANT. **VOLUNTEER URGENTLY NEEDED!!**

LHS would like to thank C3imaging, Liverpool, for generously printing this issue of the newsletter at a reduced cost to the Society. Visit the company's website for full details of the wide range of photographic, digital printing, exhibition, display and signage services it offers – [www.c3imaging.com](http://www.c3imaging.com)



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