



HISTORY SOCIETY

SPRING 2013

The books are back in town!

Liverpool Central Library & Archive re-opens to the public from Friday 17 May 2013. The building redevelopment has been successfully completed within budget and it includes:

- Greatly improved visitor facilities and access throughout the whole building.
- Plenty of natural daylight and a much brighter building with a dramatic atrium and two light-wells.
- Improved legibility of the building with excellent signage and much clearer links between the old and new.
- The magnificent historic buildings fully and expertly restored to their former glory both inside and outside with original features repaired and exposed. These buildings will now be accessible at all times with displays of special collections and archives and the former International Library transformed into a children's library.
- An improved and more visible presence for the Library on William Brown Street.
- A landscaped forecourt, an external café terrace, and an external 24-hour book return point.
- Increased numbers of computers and full Wi-Fi coverage throughout the building.
- Well-equipped meeting rooms of various sizes.
- A roof terrace with panoramic views across the city and over the historic buildings.

A key feature – and the initial reason for the whole project – has been constructing a repository for archives and special collections meeting the highest and latest national standards. This could only be achieved with a new building. It includes a high level of security, close environmental controls for constant low temperatures and stable relative humidity, air filtration, four-hour fire protection, and automatic fire suppression. Electronic mobile shelving allows more material to be stored in the same space. There is a state-of-the-art and well-equipped Conservation Studio which benefits from northern daylight. A document reception room allows new collections to be received, processed, cleaned and packaged before being taken into the repository.

Record Office users will find a larger space for visitors with new facilities on the 3rd floor of the new building. In the main area



The atrium at the new Central Library. Courtesy Liverpool City Council.

there are thirty microfilm machines including twenty new ones, twelve computers, fifty lockers, a sound-attenuated side room for advice and confidential discussions, plenty of shelving and study tables, display cases, and a plasma screen for information. There are toilets located on this and on every floor. This area will be open as will the Library as a whole from Monday to Friday 9.00am to 8.00pm, Saturday 9.00am to 5.00pm, and Sunday 10.00 am to 5.00pm.

There is a well-equipped and spacious sound-attenuated Searchroom. This also includes three new microfilm machines and eight computers. The Searchroom will be open from 9.30am to 6.00 pm Monday and Tuesday, 9.30 am to 8.00 pm Wednesday, 9.30 am to 6.00 pm Thursday and Friday and 9.30 am to 5.00 pm on Saturday. Appointments will be needed so that the documents can be located and prepared in advance.

The complex and intensive move of around 40 km of books and archives, or about four million items, back from five separate sites has been going to plan. The packaging, labelling and preparation over several years have paid dividends.

Liverpool now has a Central Library and a Record Office to be proud of with excellent facilities in a blend of old and new buildings. These make a fitting home for providing long-term preservation of and access to its extensive collections covering all aspects of our city's unique and significant history.



Brenda, take a bow!

Indefatigable. That's the word many people would use to sum up veteran LHS member Brenda Murray. And it is wonderful to see that Brenda's tireless efforts over the years to promote Liverpool's history in general and the history of Seaforth in particular (including its most famous son, W.E. Gladstone) have not

gone unnoticed. For Brenda was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) in the New Year Honours List 'for services to history and heritage'. Almost surpassing that achievement was the culmination of the campaign led by Brenda for a memorial to Gladstone. The £25,000 statue was unveiled by Frank Field MP on 23 February. Well done all round Brenda who, at the age of 89, remains an inspiration!

16 December 2012 – Michael Murphy

LIVERPOOL OVERHEAD RAILWAY

Meeting report:
Mary Harrison

Michael took us on a fascinating journey through the history of the Liverpool docks and the building of the famous Liverpool Overhead Railway (LOR). By the 1850s the dock system had grown and extended on reclaimed land to the north and south of the town centre. Trade with West Africa and the Far East was expanding rapidly. Liverpool was handling 48% of the country's export trade. The river was always full of ships, both sailing ships and the new steam ships. It was the principal port for the New World and vast amounts of cargo were being discharged and loaded, and incredible numbers of people needed to be transported from the town to the ships, such as Jewish people forced out of Russia.

Most cargoes were moved along the docks by horse and cart but there was a small goods railway laid down, along which a horse-drawn omnibus carrying passengers could travel; its wheels were designed to divert from the tracks when necessary. As it crossed the busy pedestrian area at the Pier Head, it had to be preceded by a man carrying a red flag. All in all this was not a wholly satisfactory system.

In 1851, engineer John Grantham, proposed an overhead railway to carry passengers but the plans were blocked by Jesse Hartley, the dock engineer, who knew that the railway would make his plan to expand the docks too costly. Then in 1870 the New York Elevated Railway opened. George Lyster as representative of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, sent his son to New York to investigate and report on this new railway. Liverpool and New York were commercially and socially linked. Michael reminded us that in the film, 'Gone With the Wind' Rhett Butler excused himself from helping Scarlett financially with the words – "All my money is in Liverpool". The report was favourable, but the Dock system was controlled by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board and they would not allow the proposed railway within the dock estate due to a perceived risk of fire.

Step forward William Forwood. He was a member of a shipping and cotton family and an intrepid traveller from the age of 17, sailing round Cape Horn, and visiting America during the Civil War, when he declined a chance to meet Abraham Lincoln. After returning to Liverpool, he became a politician and eventually became Lord Mayor of Liverpool. He decided that an overhead railway must be built and The Liverpool Overhead Railway Company was formed in 1888. The finest engineers, Sir Douglas Fox and James Greathead, were commissioned to design it. At first steam traction was considered, but Alfred Holt opposed it because of the steam, and therefore the risk of fire, would have been dangerous for the warehouse contents, so electric traction was chosen. Holt favoured a single track, but permission for a double track railway had already been obtained.

Work commenced in 1890 and in four years approximately five miles of railway was built, stretching from Alexandra Dock in the north to Herculaneum Dock in the south. Michael made us realise what a fantastic work it really was. MDHB made things difficult, limiting entry and egress from the docks. The structure was made of wrought iron girders, 16 feet above the road. It was a standard gauge, laid on longitudinal timbers. There had to be hydraulic lifting sections to allow goods access to the docks and these could only be raised when the trains were not running. At one dock the track dropped to road level to pass under the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway, rather resembling a switchback. It was the world's first electric elevated railway and the first to use automatic signalling and electric signal lights. Michael told us that this system was so good that even in the worst 'pea souper' fogs, the trains never stopped running.

The railway was officially opened on 4th February, 1893, by the Leader of the Opposition, the Marquis of Salisbury. Why not William Gladstone, asked Michael? Well, William Forwood did not like him! Services were running from 6th March and the viaduct soon gained the affectionate nickname of 'The Dockers' Umbrella'. Trains operated from 5.30am at 10 minute intervals and, at 12-13 mph, it took 27 minutes to traverse the system.

Michael told us how it became commercially successful with the public before and during the First World War. He described the many changes and extensions and the vast number of passengers it carried. But in the 1930s passenger numbers and income declined and then, during World War Two, it suffered from bombing raids. Many repairs and new carriages were needed. As it was a purely local undertaking it was not nationalised in 1948 with the rest of the British railway system. The company appealed to the government for financial assistance, but it was refused. The shipping companies did not help. The Labour controlled Liverpool City Council led by John Braddock refused to help finance the railway. Trains were phased out and replaced by buses, and in 1956 the Liverpool Overhead Railway was closed down. By 1958 the wonderful structure had disappeared to the sorrow of us all.



An LOR train passing through Pier Head with Albion House, HQ of the White Star Line, in the background. Ron Jones archive.

17 February 2013 – Steve Binns MBE., Liverpool's Official Community Historian

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVERPOOL IN THE LIFE OF DICKENS

Meeting report:
Netta Dixon

Steve spoke first of Dickens' letters; he wrote thousands of them in his lifetime. After his death in June 1870, his sister-in-law produced a set of letters with his daughter; the letters have wonderful footnotes. Two months before his wedding in February 1836, he wrote to his future wife, Catherine Hogart. However by the time he owned his house at Gadshill Place, his son Henry and daughter Katie had burnt thousands of letters, and we only have other letters because the recipients kept them. Even his most recent biographers have not read all his letters.

Dickens was born at Portsmouth on 7 February 1812. By the age of 12 he was living with his family in London, where he worked for

a time in a blacking factory. In the 1840s he edited the *London Daily News* and was a political reporter. Then he became the publisher of *Sketches by Boz*. He was a great observer of people and events.

Between 1838 and 1869, Dickens made numerous visits to Liverpool and was always warmly received; he stayed at the old Adelphi Hotel, and called it – “His place of safety in the North”. He especially liked the turtle soup and mentions it in 11 letters. He liked everything on his London desk to be transferred, and for everything to be in its place. Steve told us that during Dickens’ first visit to Liverpool there was no reference to it in the papers at the time. From the 1840s Dickens travelled and campaigned against social evils; he gave talks, readings and wrote pamphlets, plays and letters. Dickens was not a big fan of Parliament but realised that, if changes were to be made to the social order, Parliament had to be the way forward. In articles, he told the Chartists to avoid street demonstrations and expressed the hope for consensus in political debates. He only met Gladstone once; their common ground was their belief in education.

Dickens sailed to America from Liverpool on at least two occasions. In 1842 he stayed at the Adelphi Hotel prior to sailing to America in the Cunard steamship *Britannia*. In February 1844, he made his third visit to the Mechanics’ Institute, where he commented about the gentility of the audience; 1,000 people attended the event, and he spoke about the gas fittings in a letter to his wife. He noted that there were women in the galleries and that he received adulation from the audience. Even his friends had to worship at his feet! A pianist Christine Weller from a well-known Liverpool family obsessed him. In 1844, he describes Liverpool as a beautiful town which has outlived its enemies (perhaps referring to the slave trade). He said that the “town was beginning to respect a measure of equality” and that he would make all his children join institutions like the Liverpool Institute. Steve said that Dickens wanted to move public opinion without antagonising it. In 1847 and 1852, his visits were to do with acting; in 1847, he appeared at the Theatre Royal in Williamson Square in ‘Every Man in his Humour’; in 1848, his company performed in ‘The Merry Wives of Windsor’. Dickens was very controlling; everything had to be just as he wanted it to be. For example, he allocated the parts to the actors in his company. His public readings made him a lot of money.

In August 1846, he gave two-hour readings over four days to 2,800 people in the Philharmonic Hall. In 1862, he gave readings in the Small Concert Room of St George’s Hall.

In 1866, at readings in St George’s Hall, 3,000 people were turned away. In 1869, when he was in Liverpool in October for six nights, 1,500 people had to be turned away at the Theatre Royal; the theatre was filled every night for a week. Such was his popularity that he never walked in Liverpool – he was carried aloft! People constantly stopped him in the street simply to touch his hand – they really believed he could change their lives.

On the 10th April 1869, the Mayor organised a banquet for 1,600 people in St George’s Hall. Dickens made three speeches about Liverpool’s achievements since 1842, and responded to a toast, praising the town for changes in the lives of the people; there was a more equitable society for all by then.

Liverpool provided Dickens with the diversity he required. He once wrote: “Liverpool is in my heart – next only to London”. Dickens died on 9th June 1870.

(When the literary biographer Claire Tomalin gave the Roscoe Lecture in St George’s Hall in October 2012, she said she was delighted to be there because of its connections with Dickens, whose biography ‘Charles Dickens. A Life’ was published in 2011).



Charles Dickens c1867-8. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

17 March 2013 – Christina Spencer

HISTORY OF THE BIBBY LINE 1807-2012

Meeting report:
Netta Dixon

Christina, who has worked as the archivist for the Bibby Line for 20 years, gave us a very detailed talk on this thriving company, which has been managed and controlled by the same family for 206 years. A Bibby has been at the helm since 1807 but the managing director has never automatically been the eldest son. Since 1870, the controlling interest has gone to a member of the company and the company chooses the most suitable person to manage it. Sir Michael Bibby is now the Managing Director but does not own the company. Christina, who has correspondence books going back to 1810, gave us a history of the line, the part it has played in wars (it provided troop transport from the Crimean War until the Iraq War in 2003) and told us how it has changed over the years according to circumstances and how it has managed to survive by adapting to modern conditions.

John Bibby, a farmer’s boy who came to Liverpool in 1800 and found a job in the iron forging business, eventually became a ships’ manager for Highfield & Sons where he saved enough money to buy one share (ships are owned in 64th shares). However, when he married Mary Mellard in 1805, she came with the then considerable dowry of £2,500, which enabled John to set up in shipping as ‘John Bibby & Co.’ in 1807.

John set up a yellow metal (brass) business in Garston and was the main supplier of copper to all the shipyards of the UK – copper was used to protect wooden ships and copper sheets with the inscription ‘John Bibby’ were recently found on HMS *Victory*. John, the eldest of John’s four sons was not interested in the business; he married Fanny Hartley, a daughter of Jesse Hartley of Albert Dock fame. To this day, Bibbys look after All Hallows Church, Allerton, as it was built by a Hartley. Although a second son, James, had a property portfolio, he was not interested in the shipping business, which was thriving as they had discovered a way of taking cargo to Suez across the desert on 4,000 camels, instead of going round by South Africa. At first the ships went to Ireland, South America and the Mediterranean, but in 1830 they went as far as Bombay. In 1840, John Bibby was found dead in a farm pond, a mystery that was never solved. John left his children a fortune, and the business, which was managed by James, became ‘John Bibby and Sons’. In the 1850s iron steamers were added to the fleet and their iron screw steamship *Arno* served as a troopship in the Crimean War.

...continued on back page.

LIVERPOOL HISTORY SOCIETY: APRIL – DECEMBER 2013

21 April	Harvey Lonsdale Elmes and Liverpool	James O'Keefe
19 May	Annual General Meeting starting at 1.30pm , followed by talk: The life and times of Abdullah Quilliam	Professor Ron Geaves
16 June	Visit to the new Central Library (details to be announced)	
July & August	No meetings – summer recess	
22 September	In the footsteps of Peter Ellis (architect of Oriel Chambers & 16 Cook St.)	Graham Jones
20 October	John James Audubon and Liverpool	Hugh Hollinghurst
17 November	My life as a Mersey river pilot	Stuart Wood
15 December	Christmas traditions of Liverpool	Ken Pye

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. With the exception of the AGM, which starts at 1.30pm (doors open 1.00pm), all meetings start at 2pm (doors open 1.30pm).

James Bibby was a friend of Edward Harland and they decided that Edward should have a shipyard in Liverpool, but as Edward did not have a licence to build ships on the Mersey, he went to Belfast, where James and Edward bought a shipyard in 1859. Bibby's *Venetian* was the first vessel built there; of the first 21 ships built, 18 were for the Bibby Line. In 1880 Harland and Wolff built two steamers for Bibby for the Burma trade, which were named *Lancashire* and *Yorkshire*, beginning a practice of naming Bibby ships after English counties. There would have been no Harland and Wolff without the Bibby Line and over 207 ships were built there. James' partnership with Frederick Leyland, son of the landlady of a famous Liverpool pub, was less successful; when James retired to Shropshire in 1870, he gave Power of Attorney to Frederick Leyland who transferred 21 ships to his Leyland Line. James returned and with his nephew Arthur Wilson Bibby (1846-1935), he started the company up again as Bibby Brothers & Co. A resolution was passed stating that the family, in the hope of avoiding another unfortunate experience, must hold the majority of shares. They ordered two first class steamers for the Burma trade and set a record of 27 days for the journey. The term POSH (Port Out Starboard Home) originated on these steamers. The *Yorkshire* and the *Staffordshire* (1891) were used as troop ships in the Boer War. Both did sterling service in World War One, and the *Oxfordshire* (1912) was used as a hospital ship in both World Wars and was sold as late as 1957. All Bibby ships were requisitioned in World War Two; in 1939 the *Yorkshire* was torpedoed with the loss of 33 passengers and 25 crew members. Bibby's lost two ships in World War Two.



The 600 ft-long dry bulk carrier 'Shropshire', delivered to Bibby's in 2009, has a cargo capacity of 71,600 cubic meters. Courtesy Bibby Line Ltd.

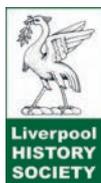
In 1928 Bibby's set up the Holiday Cruise Ship Company for first class passengers only. The ships sailed to Egypt, the Sudan, Ceylon and Burma and carried cargo as well as passengers. They sometimes sailed with only one passenger, who had 120 crew members serving him! In 1931 the company's name was changed to Bibby Line Ltd.

A locomotive no. 35020, built in 1945, was named *Bibby Line*; the present managing director, Sir Michael Bibby, refused to buy the name plaque for the asking price of £18,000. Hornby also brought out a model of the train.

Sir Derek Bibby (1922-2002) invested in a fleet of transatlantic container ships, including *MV Dart Atlantic* (1972) but the 1970s were difficult times. In 1980, the *MV Derbyshire* sank in the South China Sea with all hands when it was overwhelmed by typhoon Orchid; there were several enquiries into the loss of the ship, the biggest British-registered merchant ship ever to have been lost at sea. The company helped the survivors, but there was no official compensation from the State.

Since then, the company has diversified into a broad range of business activities, including financial services with 7,500 clients in twelve countries. Christina told us about the detention centre prison ships, the diving vessels which service rigs and have massive compression chambers; the Bibby Line has engineers who build and maintain rigs for offshore oil and gas companies. The company also has a fleet of distribution vehicles contracted out to large supermarkets such as Sainsbury's. The company is still committed to ship owning and has five new vessels, including the bulk carriers *Shropshire* (pictured above) and *Hertfordshire*.

The Bibby Line Ltd., with its Head Office in Duke Street, is still the largest employer on Merseyside with 5,500 employees. Christina told us that several members of the Bibby family, including two women, still work for the company. She said that we might see a woman at the helm one day!



Chairman: John Tiernan ● **Administration Secretary:** Fred Forrest (fred_forrest@hotmail.com) ● **Membership Secretary:** Graham Jones, The Croft, Cropton, Pickering, North Yorkshire YO18 8HL (membershipsecretary@liverpoolhistorysociety.org.uk) ● **Programme Secretary:** Tony Melling (tony.melling@aol.co.uk) ● **Treasurer:** Tom Lacy (treasurer@liverpoolhistorysociety.org.uk) ● **Newsletter/Journal Editor:** Ron Jones (ron@rja-mpl.com) ● **Hon. Librarian:** Cynthia Stonall (cynthstonall@yahoo.co.uk) ● **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/>

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