

HISTORY SOCIETY

SUMMER 2013

## Society publishes new book about Peter Ellis

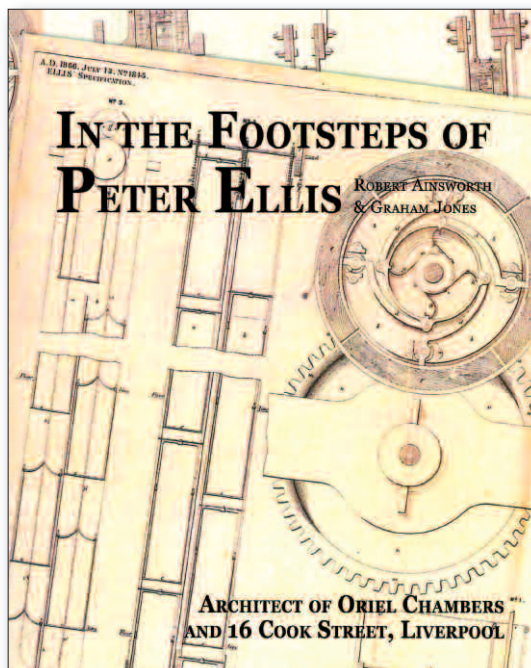
### Two LHS members walk in the footsteps of Liverpool's elusive architectural genius, Peter Ellis

Written by Graham Jones and the late Rob Ainsworth, and published by the Liverpool History Society, this new book, launched at the Athenaeum on 4 September, traces the life of a local architect from his birth in 1805 on Shaw's Brow to his death in 1884 at Falkner Square. It vividly re-creates with text, maps and photographs the parts of Liverpool (some then outside the boundary) in which Peter Ellis lived and worked, and where he met his Evertonian bride, Mary Helen Syers. Its title is, therefore, particularly appropriate and, as the authors point out, this is a book about an architect and not architecture.

Apart from the two buildings for which he is best known and for which he was reviled in print in his lifetime, but for which he is now internationally renowned, Ellis' actual built output, as the book details, was very local and decidedly run of the mill.

The authors' research, however, has unearthed many surprises about an architect of whom not much was widely known, such as his submission of designs in the competition for what became St George's Hall and his other life as an inventor, the apogee of which must be his ground-breaking patent for the paternoster lift, which he appears to have been paid by a rival to allow to lapse. Painstaking though the authors' research has been, no image of the elusive Peter Ellis has surfaced to date.

This is a hefty book of 240 pages, printed in full colour and is brought to life by the lavish use of some 260 photographs, paintings, illustrations and maps (extensive use has been made of Michael Gage's superb 1835 trigonometrical map of



Above, left: front cover of the book showing detail of drawing of Peter Ellis' paternoster lift, a world first. Above right: first known photograph of Oriel Chambers c1880. (courtesy Colin Wilkinson)

Liverpool). Each chapter is extensively referenced and there is a useful index.

Mention must be made that the book has been expertly designed by Matthew Duddington. It is his first but you would never know it: a bright future awaits him!

This book (RRP £24) will be of great interest to local historians and no doubt more widely to architectural historians.

A generous discount is available to Society members: contact the Membership Secretary (details on back page). Otherwise, it is available from a range of local outlets and can be ordered (post-free) direct from the Society's website.

### Farewell, old friends

The Society is sad to report the death of two of its members: **Harry McLeish** passed away in June at the age of 91. Harry worked at Cammell Laird for over 40 years, including throughout the Second World War. Drawing upon his Laird's heritage and his interest in local history, Harry wrote a novel *Sunset Over Cherbourg: The Adventures of Jamie on the Alabama*. In fact one of his last outings was to visit Laird's shipyard and HMS *Edinburgh* during the Battle of the Atlantic celebrations the month before he died. That apart, Harry was an avid Evertonian

and an active member of both the Shareholders' Association and the Everton Disabled Supporters Association.

**Peter Jones** passed away in May. In addition to being a member of LHS, Peter was also the well-respected Editor of the Liverpool & Southwest Lancashire Family History Society's Journal for over ten years. Peter, who lived in Irby with his wife Olga, was a former police officer and his ex-colleagues who turned up in force at his funeral gave him a splendid send off. Anyone who had dealings with Peter would confirm that he was one of the nicest and most helpful people you could meet.

21 April 2013 – James O’Keeffe, MA.

## HARVEY LONSDALE ELMES

Meeting report:  
Netta Dixon



*Photograph of St George's Hall in the days of the hansom cab. Visible is the classical sculpture on the south façade of the building, taken down in 1950 as being in a decayed condition and later, reputedly, "used as hardcore"! © Ron Jones Collection.*

James O’ Keeffe, who works at St. George’s Hall, spoke to us about the short life of Harvey Lonsdale Elmes the distinguished architect of St George’s Hall, universally acknowledged as perhaps the best, and certainly one of Europe’s finest, neo-classical buildings. Today it is regarded as the ultimate symbol of Liverpool’s mid-Victorian standing in the world. For almost a decade, until his premature death in 1847 at the age of 33, it consumed most of Elmes’ energies.

Elmes was born near Chichester on 10 February 1814 to Mary Ann and James Elmes, a surveyor in the Port of London who was also an architect. His paternal grandfather and uncle were builders. After he left school in Mortlake, where he developed a love of music and became a skilled violinist, his parents tried to steer him towards a career in commerce, but having studied ‘the antiquities of Athens’ he became focussed on a career in architecture. So, in 1831, at the age of 17, his mother allowed him to join his father’s office to train as an architect via the route of practical experience.

In 1834, at the age of 20, he joined the office of Henry Goodrich, a Bath architect who had adopted Greek and Romanesque architectural styles. A year later he became a partner in his father’s business.

Through his love of music, Elmes met Mary Wilkins Terry, daughter of Charles Terry, whom he married in 1841. Two years later they had their first, and only, child, Frederick.

Elmes’ future brother-in-law showed him an advertisement in *The Times* offering a prize of £250 guineas in a competition to design a concert hall in classical style to be built in Liverpool at a cost of £30,000. On 12 July 1839, it was announced that the 25-year old had won the competition. The following year he won a separate competition to design a new Assize Courts building. His success in the second competition aroused suspicion; fingers were pointed and some people suspected foul play in the selection process.

Elmes was impressed by Greek Revival ideas and was keen to make his fortune as an architect. Liverpool was in favour of classical architecture so there was a synergy there. On 8 October 1840, the Elmes’ design for the Courts was approved and he was appointed architect. As there was insufficient funding for both buildings, it was decided that the two functions would be combined in one building, as previously advocated by Elmes. His plans allowed for a courtroom at each end of the Great Hall, which was inspired by drawings of Roman baths. Two courts were to be built – a Crown Court at the south end and a Civil Court at the north end. Later, the large organ installed at the north end would block this view. The main entrance to the building was to be at the north end. Elmes adopted a Corinthian temple plan; he wanted a black marble floor, but this was declined because of a shortage of funds. After Elmes’ death, his mentor, Charles Cockerell, designed the magnificent Minton tiled floor that we can (occasionally) see today.

The Great Hall was flanked by red granite columns, which carried an enormous barrel-vaulted ceiling made of hollow blocks, a device introduced by the engineer Sir Robert Rawlinson to keep weight to a minimum. In 1841, Elmes employed a heating engineer, David Boswell Reid, to install a heating, ventilation and air conditioning system in a cavernous basement. In the process, St George’s Hall became the world’s first air-conditioned building (see Neil Sturrock’s article in the 2012 LHS Journal). The Concert Hall, designed by Cockerell, where Charles Dickens gave many of his readings, was added some four years after the main building was completed.

However, Elmes did not put all his eggs in the one St George’s Hall basket. Despite juggling quite a number of commissions, he still found time to travel to Europe to visit its architectural wonders. It would probably be true to say that he was a driven man with a ridiculous workload – he was often to be found asleep at his desk. Inevitably his workload took a toll on his health.

Elmes also entered, and won, a competition for the design of the new Collegiate Institution in Shaw Street in 1840. However, it all ended in tears with a vitriolic falling out with the Collegiate building committee and the contractor Samuel Holme. He ended up just supervising the frontage of the building for a modest fee. He also won commissions in London to design the American Embassy and a number of private houses. And back on Merseyside he designed an Italianate mansion ‘Elliesslie’ as well as the Tudor/Gothic-style ‘Radcliffe’ (now six flats), both in Wallasey. In Liverpool, he designed Allerton Tower (demolished in 1937) for his friend Hardman Earle, Thingwall Hall in Knotty Ash, now a care home, and a School for the Blind in Hardman Street.

Although Elmes was frustrated by the slow progress of St George’s Hall (the foundation stone had been laid in 1838 to commemorate the coronation of Queen Victoria) and the energy-sapping journeys between Liverpool and London, he was no doubt pleased when Prince Albert expressed his delight with the Hall during his visit to Liverpool in 1846 when he presented Elmes with a gold medal.

By the following year, Elmes’ health was failing and he was advised to visit the West Indies; he set sail for Jamaica on 22 October and on 26 November when, already suffering from consumption, he fell from his carriage and subsequently died. Before his death he wrote to Sir Robert Rawlinson and asked that he and Professor Charles Cockerell should attend to the details of the final stages of the construction of St George’s Hall. The Hall was finally opened in 1854 (although the courts had opened earlier, in 1851). By then, costs had risen to £300,000. Interestingly, James told us that a £23m restoration was carried out during the 2000s with Prince Charles officially reopening the building on 23 April 2007.

Tragically, Elmes left a widow and son without provision (it was acknowledged that he had been poorly paid) and in February 1848 a fund was created in Liverpool to support his family. There is still a fund bearing his name administered by Liverpool University.

Finally, James pointed out that there is no statue to Elmes in Liverpool, but that St. George’s Hall remains as a wonderful monument to his undoubted genius. Today, it is a Grade One Listed building and an integral part of the city’s World Heritage Site.

19 May 2013 – Professor Ron Geaves

## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ABDULLAH QUILLIAM

Meeting report:  
Ron Jones

As members of the Liverpool History Society well know, the city produced an endless stream of remarkable men and women during its Victorian heyday. William Henry Quilliam, a.k.a. Abdullah Quilliam, was one such man. Hope University's Professor of Studies of Religion, Ron Geaves, an authority on the history of Muslims and Islam in Britain, came to talk to us about Quilliam's colourful and, at times, bizarre life.

Quilliam came from a background that gave no hint of what he would eventually become – the Sheikh of Islam in Great Britain and the founder of the country's first registered mosque. He was born in Liverpool into a wealthy Methodist family with an Isle of Man heritage going back to the 18th century – Quilliam kept a home on the island all his life. Quilliam's family was very well known in Liverpool where it had a watch manufacturing business. The family was also vehemently anti-drink and young William took the pledge when nine years old, a pledge he kept until his death; from a very early age, he was also a prominent temperance movement speaker.

To help fund his legal studies, William became a journalist with the well-known satirical Liverpool newspaper *The Porcupine*; it was an experience that was to stand him in good stead throughout his life.

It is thought that his epiphany came when, suffering from overwork, he travelled to Spain and Morocco and was impressed, amongst other things, by the latter's alcohol-free culture. As a result he gave up his Methodist faith and converted to Islam in 1887. At the same time he was strongly interested in socialism and especially social equality. He was very much on the side of the working man, and woman, and the underdog. He was a trade unionist and became President of a dock workers union.

The law was his chosen profession (he became a solicitor in 1878) and he gained fame as a defence lawyer, pleading the cases of a number of notorious late 19thC murderers. He campaigned against capital punishment, advocated negro rights in the USA, and was passionate in his belief that only the law could be trusted for – "You cannot trust politicians to defend democracy." He offered free legal aid to the women of Toxteth whose husbands had run off leaving them to bring up the kids on their own and helped set up an orphanage where mothers could leave their children whilst they tried to find work to support their families. He even took orphans on holiday to the Isle of Man.

William became very adept at converting people to Islam (including the Mayor of Stalybridge, Lord Stanley and his own mother!) and it is estimated that he converted some 500-600 throughout the UK. This was a process he began in 1888 when he started to convert people from his digs in Mount Pleasant; his horrified landlady threw him out! Not surprisingly, then as now, there was a fair amount of antipathy against Muslims; once a 400-strong mob attacked worshippers at the mosque. Quilliam was undaunted.

When the head of the Ottoman Empire heard of Quilliam's efforts he awarded him the title of Sheikh al-Islam of the British Isles, a title that was endorsed by Queen Victoria who recognised Quilliam as the leader of the country's Muslims. The Ameer (ruler) of Afghanistan gave him 2,300 guineas which he used to buy 8-12 Brougham Terrace, a terrace of four houses in West Derby Road. One of these, No. 8., was converted into a mosque, the country's first, which opened its doors on Christmas Day 1889. It became a thriving centre of Islamic activity and was followed by lecture rooms, a boarding school and a small orphanage. The Shah of Persia appointed him that country's Consul in Liverpool. He was often to be seen in full Turkish regalia, topped by a fez. If indeed he rode through the streets of Liverpool on his white Arab stallion, a gift from the Sultan of Turkey, he would have made a spectacular sight!

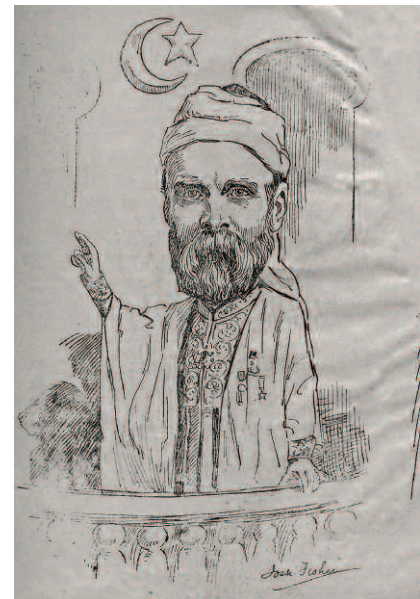
Using his skills as a journalist, Quilliam produced a weekly publication *The Crescent* between 1893 and 1908 which was his main vehicle to promote Islam. He even re-wrote every hymn in the English Hymnbook so that it applied to Islam. Later he published *Islamic World* a journal with a world-wide circulation. Quilliam also conducted Muslim weddings and funerals – his first was a former Methodist preacher who had converted to Islam.

Liverpool in those days was "Britain's front door" and Muslims, both poor and prominent, would beat a path to Brougham Terrace to pray at the mosque and meet Abdullah Quilliam who became famous throughout the Muslim world. Muslims formed the bulk of the "below decks" crews of the British merchant fleet and Quilliam not only took on legal matters for them but also looked after their spiritual needs. Local hospitals would contact him if they had a Muslim admission and he would visit those who were seriously ill, promising them a Muslim funeral if they died – he even bought cemetery plots for Muslims, for example at Fazakerley Cemetery. He would contact their next of kin and make sure that any monies owed to them were passed on to their families. Wealthy Muslims too would stop off at the mosque as part of their "Grand Tour" of Europe, often staying with Quilliam as his guests.

Ron told us that loyalty and identity were always a dilemma for Quilliam, and other Muslims – is it to their King or Queen, their country, their government, their religious leader? For Quilliam his first loyalty was to his country and monarch and his second to his religious leader, the Caliph of Islam, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. He argued that his loyalty to Britain did not mean loyalty to the British Government. His loyalty was to challenge the Government. If they passed a law against his "God" he would challenge them.

As Sheikh al-Islam, Quilliam could, and did, issue fatwahas such as the one objecting to the use of Egyptian troops during the Sudan war on the basis that the Koran says that no Muslim can go to war and kill another Muslim. Religion and politics was for Quilliam then, and Muslims today, a difficult area.

There was much about the amazing life of Abdullah Quilliam that Ron Geaves was not able to tell us in the short time allocated to him, e.g. his mysterious decision to leave Britain in 1908, never to return to Liverpool, and his re-emergence in London under the pseudonym of Professor Henri de Léon. However, if you would like to find out more you could do no better than to get your hands on a copy of Ron's 2010 book, *Islam in Victorian Britain - The Life and Times of Abdullah Quilliam*, published by Kube Publishing at £16.99 (less on Amazon and even less again as a Kindle download). On-line, have a look at the Abdullah Quilliam Society's website: [www.abdullahquilliam.com](http://www.abdullahquilliam.com)



Abdullah Quilliam portrayed in preaching mode in a contemporary newspaper cartoon. Image courtesy of Liverpool Record Office.

## LIVERPOOL HISTORY SOCIETY: OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2013

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 2.00pm (doors open 1.30pm).



© Photo: Ron Jones

### LHS members visit new Central Library

Sunday 16 July saw a bumper turnout of members for the Society's summer visit to the newly-opened Central Library. And what an eye-opener it turned out to be! In the capable hands of Libraries chiefs, Joyce Little and David Stoker, who acted as Project Director for the £50m redevelopment scheme, we were given a very informative introductory talk then split into two groups for a grand tour of the building.

One of the highlights had to be the behind-the-scenes look at the new state-of-the-art archive repository, temperature and humidity controlled and with

computerised "shuffling" book stacks, with the capacity to store the library's collection of over 3.2 million items plus space for another twenty years' growth. That apart, there are over 15,000 linear meters of shelving to hold some 355,000 books. Our members were also impressed by how "hi-tech" the building had become, with free wi-fi throughout, 150 computers and iPads and book-issuing scanners. There's also a very pleasant ground floor café with outdoor terrace.

But the old has not completely been jettisoned for old favourites such as the Picton Library, Hornby Library and the Oak Room have all been sensitively refurbished and made more accessible to visitors.

The main library building itself, with its soaring atrium (pictured above), is simply stunning and it has quickly joined the growing list of Liverpool's tourist attractions – 100,000 people turned up to see the building during its first month of opening. It is a class act and well deserving of all the plaudits that have been heaped upon it.

### What lies beneath?

**Hidden Liverpool** is a new, year-long project which invites residents to share memories and stories of buildings that are now empty or underused, before thinking about how they could be brought back to life for use in the modern city. It includes a year of activities including exhibitions, a schools programme, design workshops and debates. The project is devised and managed by *Placed* with support from the Heritage Lottery fund. *Placed* are keen to involve LHS members in their project so, if you are interested and would like to know more, visit *Placed*'s website at [www.hiddenliverpool.org.uk](http://www.hiddenliverpool.org.uk)

### Bookshelf Ron Jones

**The Japanese Consul – The life of James Lord Bowes in Liverpool** L.S. Smith, 2013. Liverpool History Press. 176 pages, 120 illustrations. Paperback. ISBN 978 0 9573833-0-2 Limited edition of 500 copies. £9.99.

Did you know: that Japanese Samurai once walked the streets of Liverpool?

That a Prime Minister of Japan once did 'work experience' in an office in Dale Street, which is still there today?

That Victorian Liverpool boasted the only Japanese art museum in the Western world and that the building which housed its treasures still survives in the heart of Toxteth, sandwiched between a church and a synagogue?

These and numerous other facts can be found in this first, and indeed only, biography of James Lord Bowes written by local historian and Japanophile Steve Smith.

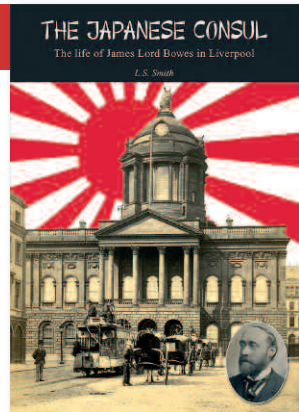
In 1888 Liverpool was honoured by the appointment of local wool broker and self-made millionaire James Lord Bowes as the first foreign-born Honorary Consul of the Japanese Empire in the United Kingdom. By then Bowes' collection of Japanese art works had grown so extensive that it numbered well over two thousand pieces and, two years later, he constructed a large private Museum of Japanese Art in the grounds of his home, Streatlam Tower, in Princes Road.

Bowes opened the museum to the public to benefit the church and orphanage charities he supported in Liverpool. He also published several books on Japanese art which are still being printed and which stand as part of the foundations of Western understanding of Japanese art.

Bowes was also prominent in the city's business and social life and was Deputy Chairman of the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce and Chairman of the Liverpool Art Club. Truly one of the 'movers and shakers' of Victorian Liverpool he is now, sadly, all but forgotten.

Copies of the book can be found at the Albert Dock Tourist Information Centre or can be bought on-line (postage-free) at [www.liverpoolhistorypress.co.uk](http://www.liverpoolhistorypress.co.uk)

**LHS members will be able to buy signed copies at a discounted price at the October 2013 meeting.**



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 ● **Newsletter Editor:** Ron Jones (ron@rja-mpl.com) ● **Hon. Librarian:** Cynthia Stonall (cynthstonall@yahoo.co.uk)  
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 ● **LHS Email:** enquiries@liverpoolhistorysociety.org.uk ● **Journal Editor & Webmaster:** Posts vacant – volunteers 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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