



THE ANTIQUARIAN

The occasional newsletter of the Lytham Heritage Group

Issue No. 4
November 1987

Over-shadowing all else in the group's recent activities was the splendid success of the Walter Eastwood art exhibition at Lytham Baths during the second half of August, attended by more than 7,000 people. Many new members joined our group as a result of their attending this wonderful FREE exhibition. Our chairman, Alan Ashton, has commented, "The Group's credibility all over the county has been much enhanced, and many professional people concerned in such undertakings have indicated their pleasure in what has been achieved. We are also very grateful to our good friends from the Lytham St. Annes Art Society, who collaborated so splendidly with us in putting on the exhibition". In our last newsletter, on the eve of the exhibition, I ventured to suggest that it promised to be the jewel in the crown of the group's first year. That forecast was admirably borne out.

But, many other important and interesting matters have been discussed and organised recently. We are pleased to announce that we have now a headquarters office and archive room at Lytham Library - the old Toc H room. This room is only costing us a very small amount in rent, but much work remains to be done on it to bring it to the standard which we feel that you, our members, deserve. Certainly it will enable us to foster a wider involvement of members, and to this end, a questionnaire has recently been sent out to members. If you have not already returned yours, please do so as soon as possible, for this will help us to provide for your interests all the better.

An attractive programme of future events is now being worked out - and members will be informed as soon as possible. Incidentally, some of these meetings will be during the day-time, as not all members are keen to go out at night in winter.

This issue contains, like the last one, short features by two of our members. In one, John Dickinson recalls his memories of the night, sixty long years ago, when Lytham Pier went up in flames. In the other, Executive Committee member Barry Dawson goes back nearly 30 years to a well-remembered occasion when he took luncheon with Mrs. Violet Clifton at Lytham Hall.

A local history quiz has been compiled for, and sent out to, all 13 senior and primary schools in Lytham St. Annes. This is planned for the early New Year and book-taken prizes will be awarded to the winners. An excellent link is being forged with our local schools, four of which co-operated splendidly with us in providing back-up work at the entrance to the Walter Eastwood Art Exhibition. The quiz has a section for the under-twelves, and one for those youngsters over that age.

We had "lost" the display cabinet which was such a useful feature for us in Lytham Library - only temporarily though. It was removed to another branch by the County Library Services and we are delighted to see that it has been replaced by an even better one.

Last and very far from least, we now have a new secretary, Janet Kitchen, who has taken over from Norma Darley, who was thanked for her services at a recent committee meeting.

Past events:

On Wednesday afternoon, August 19th, Number 18 Preston Road, Lytham, opened its doors to the Heritage Group's members and friends for an afternoon tea. Friends old and new mingled together, enjoying tea and scones in the house and garden, for glorious weather helped to make it a perfect afternoon. Norma reports, "On leaving, many people asked, 'Let us know when you are having another similar event, for we have enjoyed this one very much', so, yes, I most certainly will. You will all be pleased to know that we raised just over £100 - a great effort. Thank you to everyone who came, and for your gifts. May I also especially thank the kind helpers, namely Mr. and Mrs. Reg Ashworth, Mrs. Moira Walsh, Mr. Ronald Usher, Mrs. Doreen Candlish and Miss Tracey Candlish, and Christopher and Jason Darley (my children). Without all their help, this event could not have been such a great success". (Editor's note: And may we all thank YOU, Norma, for all your work in organising this excellent event, too).

THE STORY OF LYTHAM

Dr. Alan Crosby's series of 10 daytime lectures, held under the auspices of the Department of Continuing Education of Liverpool University, got away to a fine start when no less than 63 enthusiasts attended (at the time of writing this total has already risen to over 70! and is still rising!)

Dr. Crosby has been overwhelmed at such a response, since an average class numbers about 15, and as another class which he is presently running at Poulton-le-Fylde had attracted an all-time high of 27 members, the like of the Lytham class has not been experienced before. Since the series has stemmed mainly from The Group's collaboration with the University we feel a modest pride in the interest that has undoubtedly sprung, not only from within our membership, but also from the publicity deriving from the stall at the Eastwood Exhibition.

It is a rewarding experience to see what our collaboration has achieved.

"NIGHT OF THE FIRE" (by John Dickinson)

I really think I should have been in the Navy. I always wanted to sleep in a hammock and now at last my chance had come. Where on earth my father got it from I have no idea, but he was kind enough to fix two strong hooks in the bedroom walls to help me to swinging repose. Getting in was hard at first, getting out with any dignity even harder. However, I shall never forget that night in 1927, the very first in my new hammock, because it turned out to be most exciting and indeed history-making. Never did I think as I fell asleep "snug as a bug in a rug", that we should never again see Lytham Pier as we had known it for so long. My older brother and I slept in an attic four storeys up overlooking Lytham Square. We could see Southport Pier from the corner of one of the bedroom windows.

In the early hours of the morning I was wakened by my brother, already at the window, shouting - "Come on, hurry up and get dressed, the pier's on fire!". I literally tumbled out of the hammock in frenzied haste, half asleep and puzzled by the unusual activity outside. The pier night watchman was shouting into the public telephone in the Square that it was on fire and we were keen to become a part of the action.

We dressed in quick time and made our way down the three flights of stairs as quietly as our excitement would allow. Dashing across the Square towards the pier head we began to think there had been some mistake as nothing unusual could be seen. The fire was apparently smouldering in the centre of the pier - in fact the cinema we had so often visited from Lytham Endowed School was about to be engulfed. The wind was quite strong and pier fires are noted for the vicious speed of the spreading flames. There has been a history of similar fires over the past few years.

In no time the flames obtained a hold and we could hear the muffled explosions of bottles of sweets from the centre pavilion. St. Annes Fire Brigade arrived first, followed closely by the Lytham lads and in spite of the fact that they all made heroic efforts to minimise the damage the whole pavilion was soon a raging inferno. By this time a large number of people had arrived and we huddled together in small groups wondering if there would be any future for the pier. Little did we know at that time it would never be rebuilt. In spite of strong representations and protests it was closed to the public in 1938 and finally demolished in 1960. Daylight on the Sunday morning presented onlookers with a sorry sight. There was nothing but grotesque shapes of twisted metal where the elegant pavilion had been.

In the years that have passed since that dramatic night, the beach at Lytham has never seemed the same. Apart from the loss of the pier, the golden sands we remembered as children have given way to muddy flats and spartina grass. The dredgers which used to scoop up the mud and dump it beyond the river mouth have long since ceased to operate. The ships no longer thread their zig zag way to Preston Dock, so there is now no need to maintain a clear channel.

Gone too, are the pilot boats which used to guide the ships in and out, along with the house boat where the pilots would drop off from time to time. The fishing has changed dramatically. We used to carry home a couple of stones of fish caught on night lines in Granny's Bay and could often rely on a few codling from Seafield Road. I think back too, of the beautiful, sunny, Sunday morning when the crowded Isle of Man steamer "Manxman" made her last sentimental journey to Preston Dock where she lies to this day. So many changes are not for the better!

Exactly one hundred years after the "Mexico" story there are no longer any sizeable ships for which the lifeboat guarantees a chance of safety on the dangerous banks and shifting sands of the estuary. One advantage for the local heroes is that the rocket does not boom out so often as it used to do.

Looking on the bright side there is a thriving Ribble Cruising Club on the site of the former mussel purification tanks, and yachts and various other small craft are now left in peace to enjoy the freedom of the river.

Luncheon with Violet Clifton, Lytham Hall, November 1960 (by Barry Dawson)

The letter of invitation came to me, as ever, marked "c/o Dr. John Glynn, M.D., Dicconson Terrace, Lytham". This always puzzled me since Mrs. Clifton was perfectly aware that I lived on Ballam Road overlooking Green Drive Golf Course. I have come to the conclusion that her dislike of these houses which, until two spinneys were planted, were visible from the Hall, was so great that she preferred to think that I was in no sense a neighbour.

A summons to have lunch with Violet Clifton was for me only marginally less terrifying than a call to appear at the Assizes. Not that she was a frightening person - quite the contrary. It was simply that I found her "presence" to be awesome, spellbinding and tongue-tying. World-travelled, a poetess and authoress, in looks similar to Dame Edith Sitwell, she had literally "been there, seen it, done it". The widow of the legendary hunter and explorer John Talbot Clifton, a Squire of the old tradition, and mother of the last man entitled to style himself "Squire of Lytham", she inhabited a rarefied atmosphere in which reality was kept at bay. Indeed, so ascetic was she that for some five years she lived as a nun of the Order of the Sisters of the Poor Clare at Arundel, a closed order of silence and self-denial.

That, however, was the past. And so, some fifteen minutes before the appointed time, I would enter the Hall grounds by the Fairlawn Road entrance and drive to the little railway bridge. There I would pause and fortify myself with "Dutch courage" and continue along the track, past Curtains Pit and the Ice house, past the stables in a long sweep, rhododendrons all the way, to the secondary entrance to the Hall. The front entrance, flanked by stone cannon balls, was kept permanently shut, so entry was gained by ringing the side-door bell. Above was a window which was immediately opened and a face thrust out. This belonged to dear Lizzie Taylor, one of Lytham's memorable characters and Mrs. Clifton's housekeeper.

"Ah, it's you, Mr. Barry", she'd say, "I'll be down in a moment". Inside the Hall, pleasantries would be exchanged and Lizzie would precede me along the chequered, flagged corridor and up the right hand side of the grand, floating staircase, talking all the while and walking crabwise so that her face was never averted. A knock on the door to Mrs. Clifton's suite (the Best Bedroom of yore), I was announced and Lizzie withdrew. Reclining the length of the settee, with Nicky her Italian greyhound on her lap, yapping his head off, was Violet Clifton, the last lady of the Manor of Lytham. Putting Nicky on the floor, she arose slowly and advanced in greeting. Very tall, it was possible to see that as a young woman she could not have been far short of six feet in height. "You'll have a drink, will you not", she asks rhetorically, "gin with tonic water if that is suitable?". It was. Taking a vessel the size of a flower-vase, acid-etched with the Clifton coat-of-arms, she pours one quarter of a full bottle of Gordon's Gin into the mega-tumbler and dilutes it with a large bottle of Schweppes Tonic Water. Using both hands, I carry my "drink" to my chair while she resumes her semi-supine position. We talk for some twenty minutes until the Portuguese manservant appears, gabbles incomprehensibly, is replied to in his own tongue and disappears. "Shall we have lunch now?" means we shall now have lunch and I follow her into the upstairs dining-room. This is a dark, candle-lit chamber with rush matting on the floor. From the break-front mantelpiece, a bust frowns upon us and huge torchères stand like blackamoors either side the fireplace. Paintings of duck and gamebirds watch disapprovingly and the feeling gains that it is 1690 A.D. and not 1960.

The soup is served with a choice of two sherries - to be poured into the soup. Roast wild duck is followed by cabinet pudding. An hour-and-a-half passes before we leave the table and retire to the sitting-room for Turkish coffee. This is a viscous and bitter decoction served, mercifully, in cups only slightly larger than thimbles. Two "doses" are mandatory as is a refill of my portable gin-pail. If conversation had been a trifle stiff at the beginning, it now proceeds at a mild canter. Verbally we range the world; avenues of thought are explored, her reminiscences and anecdotes pour forth like jewels. Our conversation continues until the afternoon's shadows remind me that Mrs. Clifton usually rests before dinner. Around half-past four I thank her and take my leave. Using the banister rail, I descend the vast staircase with great care. Lizzie Taylor materialises from the left as I reach ground level and after a few minutes of chatting I walk to my car. Waving goodbye, I drive along the pathway some two hundred yards to my favourite clump of rhododendrons. With the car safely parked out of sight, I leave the wheel and climb into the back seat. In a minute I am fast asleep.

An owl hoots and consciousness returns. It is pitch dark, I am half-frozen and totally disoriented. In a panic I tumble out of the car on to twigs and dry leaves. I get into the driver's seat and put the lights on, calm returns and I light a fragrant weed. Exhaling luxuriantly, I recall the day's events and the reason for my being parked in a rhododendron bush in the grounds of Lytham Hall at 7 o'clock of a winter's night. And I remember! I had taken lunch with Violet Clifton.

Lytham Lifeboat Museum's 1987 Season

Despite the appalling summer and the Museum having to be closed for safety reasons whilst work was being carried out on the windmill, it has had many visitors and the R.N.L.I. collecting box raised more than £700.

This year saw several innovations and some new lifeboat exhibits. The new method of displaying and covering the photographs and drawings was a particular feature - no drawing pins but instead a new "wonder" backing substance found by member John Tranter. Arnold Broxup also instituted a Visitors' Book and the comments therein (well most of them!) made it all worthwhile. The Museum has been visited by people from America, Canada and Malta besides just about every corner of the British Isles.

The year's particular feature exhibit was on Lytham Shipyard, arranged by David Forshaw and complemented by a superb display of rope work and knots made by Tony Bloomer. The exhibit resulted in several new artefacts and items of information about the shipyard and its workings.

Staffing in 1987 was a problem as the Tourist Board had cut down their local staff's hours. Members of the Heritage Group kindly volunteered and after an evening teach-in manned the Museum every Wednesday in July and August, for which the Museum Committee are very grateful.

Plans are well advanced for 1988 and it has been decided that the featured exhibit will be the Fishing Industry of Lytham and St. Annes. If anybody has any artefacts or photographs they are willing to loan or donate please contact the Hon. Curator, Frank Kilroy, on Lytham 730155.

Growing numbers

Our membership continues to grow. At the time of going to Press, we had 240 members. On this point, anyone who joins on or after 1st January 1988, will be entitled to full membership until 31st March 1989 - our year ends on March 31st each year.

Postcards

It was a pity that so few members attended Miss Diana Winterbotham's talk on "Postcards and their relationship with Local History" on Wednesday, 9th September. It was a pleasure to renew the acquaintance of former colleague Miss Winterbotham, who is Local Studies Librarian at the Lancashire Library Headquarters. She gave a very interesting and informative talk about the role of postcards and other photographs in the study of local history, despite the fact that she could not show the slides she had brought with her because her projector had broken down. She explained that some of Lancashire's District Libraries have substantial and very useful collections of photographic material in their custody.

Although postcards are a very useful source of information to the local historian, Miss Winterbotham pointed out that they have their shortcomings on the grounds that interiors were very rarely depicted, and also that postcards tended to portray more attractive local scenes.

On the subject of photographs Miss Winterbotham told us that many District Libraries, despite financial cuts affecting staffing and equipment, are managing to make photographic records of buildings in their area prior to demolition. She suggested that local history societies, who no doubt have some enthusiastic photographers among their members, could undertake this kind of work.

Fascinating collections of postcards were brought by Mrs. N. Darley, and by Mr Andrew Firth and Mrs. Marion Turner, who had come from Blaenau Ffestiniog in North Wales to be present. A vote of thanks to Miss Winterbotham was given by Mrs. Darley.

J. Kitchen.

Christmas Cards

The Group now has its own attractive Christmas Cards on sale in support of Group funds. They may be obtained from any member of the committee.

One, in colour, is the Freckleton Boatyard scene by Walter Eastwood featured on the front cover of the Exhibition catalogue, and is priced at 20p each (or in packets of 10 for £1.80).

The other, a scraper-board study in black and white of Lytham Beach and Windmill by Stanley Brown, is priced at 15p each (or in packets of 10 for £1.30)

The Antiquarian - back numbers

Members wishing to collect a complete set of the Antiquarian and who have joined subsequent to earlier numbers may order copies at a cost of 10p each from Mrs. June Bailey, West Cliffe (Phone Lytham 735935). Closing date for orders - 30th November please.

Tailpiece

Because of, shall we say, technical faults at the transmitter, our last issue contained more than its fair share of spelling and other mistakes. Hopefully, these will either have been totally eradicated, or at least greatly reduced, in this issue. However, your editor has had his leg pulled about it, and the following short letter from a member sums it all up rather neatly.....

"Dear Mr. Editor,
"Your last edition of the Antiquarian was so full of QUANTANAIRS that it really surpassed the Graunlad! Still, interpreting it was fun - and it was a jolly good edition. Many thanks.
Yours etc.
MANAGRA"

Officers and Committee 1987/88

President: Stanley Brown - 735247
Chairman: Alan F. Ashton - 738916
Secretaries: Mrs. Janet Kitchen (Keeper of Archives) - 733257
Peter Sharman (Keeper of Books & Maps) - 735590
Treasurer: Walter Brayshaw - 723433
Hon Solicitor: Graham Calderbank - 733333

Executive Committee

The Officers and:-

Tom Battersby, Chairman	(Keeper of Clifton Records)	- 737216
Michael Walsh	(Editor - Antiquarian)	- 734836
Mrs Norma Darley	(Keeper of Postcards and Pictures)	- 730320
Barry Dawson	(Keeper of Artefacts)	- 736700
David Forshaw)	(Keepers of Maritime Records)	- 794196
Frank Kilroy)		- 730155
Tom Stringer	(Keeper of Photographs and Slides)	- 730999
Mrs Moira Walsh		- 737976