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“CCS visits Liverpool”

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The Charles Close Society was founded in 1980 to bring together all those with an interest in the maps and history of the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain and its counterparts in the island of Ireland. The Society takes its name from Colonel Sir Charles Arden-Close, OS Director General from 1911 to 1922, and initiator of many of the maps now sought after by collectors.

The Society publishes a wide range of books and booklets on historic OS map series and its journal, *Sheetlines*, is recognised internationally for its specialist articles on Ordnance Survey-related topics.

CCS visits Liverpool

John Henry

Liverpool is a vibrant and attractive port city, a revelation to this first-time visitor whose only previous impressions were from the depressing news of the 1980s. For our visit in glorious sun on 5 and 6 July, CCS member Tinho da Cruz, map curator at University of Liverpool (and a transplant from the Southeast), guided us through the mapping and architectural history of his adopted city.

We began on a surveyor's traverse to the location of the Liverpool Datum locating bench marks. Prior to 1840, there was no established datum for OS maps. Why Liverpool? The OS surveyors had progressed as far north as Liverpool before this bizarre omission was addressed by Col. Thomas Colby, director of the OS. Liverpool was not only convenient to the work flow, but also central in England and Wales and its largest port. The sill of the tidal lock gate into the Victoria Dock, then the most seaward of Liverpool's numerous harbours, was chosen for eight days of hourly readings of the tide to establish an average mean tide level, which became the datum for all subsequent levelling in GB. The site area today is an exposed and nearly featureless wasteland of infilled docks, lorry parks and disused or converted Victorian warehouses. Tinho located the Liverpool Datum point by superimposing a modern plan on the old. Nice on a sunny windless day to imagine the invisible past and watch the ships go by. Liverpool's docklands have moved nearer to the sea as ships have become larger.

The datum itself was also abandoned. The second geodetic levelling, carried out between 1912 and 1921 and tied to Newlyn, compared the new benchmark readings to the 'Old values of benchmark' and expressed them as contours of error. Relative to Newlyn datum, the Liverpool datum was inclined and had an undulating surface. Rather than re-levelling from Liverpool, a new location was selected in Cornwall after taking geological advice. (Newlyn Datum was established in 1925 based on six years of automatic hourly gauging of the tide. A more precise levelling established a system of primary or fundamental bench marks, fixed on solid rock, from which secondary and tertiary circuits were precisely levelled. Now thanks to GPS, these levelling networks based on Newlyn are also history. For levelling histories in areas of subsidence, see my article *The ups and downs of benchmarks*).¹

On our way to and from the site of the Liverpool Datum, we spotted the characteristic OS benchmarks and Tinho showed us Liverpool's architectural heritage, beginning with the Albion building from whose balcony the losses of the Titanic, staffed largely by Liverpudlians, were announced. The most iconic buildings of Liverpool are the 'Three Graces' of which the Liver Building crowned by its distinctive liver birds is the best known. Moving inland from the waterfront, Oriel Chambers was a very early (1864) example of steel-framed construction which permitted large windows. Many grand buildings testified to the great wealth of Liverpool in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At Haymarket we

¹ *Sheetlines* 69, 35-36 (available to download at www.charlesclosesociety.org/Sheetlinesarchive).

visited St. John's Gardens where St John's church had stood; its tower was the location of the provisional datum for Liverpool but was abandoned in favour of the sea-level datum discussed above – another invisible fragment of the past.



Images of Liverpool:

Top row: Tinbo locating the Ordnance datum; Colby's memorial
Middle row: Picton library; at the site of the datum

Left: the three graces reflected in the ultra-modern Museum of Liverpool Life.

[photos John Henry, Ken Hollamby, John Davies]

Facing the gardens, the highly visible St George's Hall was a massive monument to civic glory housing criminal and civil courts, cells and a vast banqueting hall, all in flamboyant High Victorian style.

After lunch, we visited the recently-opened new Liverpool Central Library. It is a light and airy five storey modern building with mezzanine floors arranged around a large ovoidal atrium criss-crossed by apparently unsupported staircases. The original Picton Library, accessed from the second mezzanine level, has been retained and restored to its former magnificence. Its high circular dome grandly illuminates bookcases and alcoves arranged around the perimeter on three levels. Both modern and restored libraries were clearly being used and loved by their public. Proceeding to the fourth floor, we found the Liverpool Record Office where librarian Margaret Daley had spread examples of maps to show us the expansion of Liverpool over three centuries. It was a good opportunity to appreciate Liverpool's cartographic heritage and consolidate the morning's observations.

Tearing ourselves away, we took taxis to Liverpool Cathedral on St James Mount. It towers over St James Cemetery where we had come to pay our respects to Major General Colby. The cemetery is sheltered on the floor of a quarry descended into by a winding footpath through a short tunnel – a more dramatic entrance than your average cemetery's. The obelisk marking Colby's grave lists his achievements and honours and we were impressed (*see page 42*).

Ascending from the graveyard, we entered the Cathedral, the second longest and fifth largest in the world. It is a masonry Gothic Revival edifice built between 1904 and 1974. Its huge interior was filled with the sound of rehearsing children's choirs as we had tea on a terrace outside the refectory. From the cathedral it was a short walk to the University of Liverpool and Tinho's library in the School of Environmental Sciences. Formerly the Geography Department, the School was the home of eminent geographers FJ Monkhouse and Brian Harley. The library holds about 100,000 maps and Tinho had laid out a selection of OS and other maps of Liverpool. John Booth, he of the cholera and crime maps of Victorian London, was a native of Liverpool and similar maps of Liverpool by Hume showed Booth's influence. I was pleased to find a geological map of Liverpool by Morton, previously unknown to me.

We closed the afternoon by a visit to the Philharmonic Dining Rooms, a grand gin palace, all dark mahogany and etched glass, opposite the home of the eponymous orchestra. Tinho advised us to visit the gents for its fine porcelain and shining copper. It was impressive, and startling to find a woman tourist there taking photographs – of the exuberant architecture. She 'had to see it, it's in my guidebook'.

On Saturday morning, we reassembled near the waterfront before another tall building, which was in fact a vast ventilation stack of Portland Stone in an art nouveau style over the Queensway tunnel. We joined a tour of the stack and the shaft down to the road tunnels. The two mile Queensway tunnel under the River Mersey was the longest vehicular tunnel in the world in its day. Excavated and constructed between 1925 and 1934 by a labour force of 1700, its 46' diameter

bore was intended to accommodate the roadway in the top half and an electric tram in the lower half. On our tour we visited the control room where today's computers and monitoring screens occupy a small space beside the massive control panels of the thirties. We then descended to the fan rooms where the original huge 28' diameter fans that draw air into the tunnels were started to give us a blast. Moving laterally we entered an empty room where we could see the walls of the original St George's Dock which the ventilation stack occupied. We then descended to the road level where we ventured onto a narrow platform to watch the cars whizz by and startled a few drivers. Finally we went deeper to one of several recently constructed refuges for travellers to evacuate to in the event of an accident or fire. The refuges are in the lower half of the tunnel where the intended trams never ran. Today, a second, larger tunnel, the Kingsway, complements the Queensway. The profit from tunnel tolls subsidises the much-loved ferries across the Mersey.

Emerging from the Tunnel, we proceeded to the futuristic Museum of Liverpool Life right beside the Mersey. With much to see and little time, we opted to view the long model of the Port of Liverpool as it was in the early twentieth century when the docks were full of shipping and workers. Beside it we just had to sit in a passenger carriage that had run on eight miles of the Overhead Railway before the track was dismantled in 1957. There appears, within CCS, to be a strong correlation between cartoholism and railway-ism; maintaining this connection we found a stained glass map near a 1:1 model of the liver bird.

After lunch we passed the Canning Dock basins thronged by sun-seekers to reach the Merseyside Maritime Museum housed in warehouse D on the north side of Albert Dock. For Londoners who may know St. Katherine's Dock by the Tower, Liverpool's remaining historic Docklands at the heart of the waterfront easily triples London's in size. From the MMM we were guided by two enthusiastic young archaeologists past the Salthouse Docks and back into town, apparently. Entering a new urban park, part of Liverpool One, a 42 acre mixed-use redevelopment by the Grosvenor Estate, we left the sunshine via an indoor mall to an anonymous door and stairway to a large cavern housing the northeast corner of Liverpool's original wet dock, the first commercial wet-dock in the world. Wet docks revolutionised ports around the world. Simple in concept, a lock gate holds the dock water at high tide level so that unloading and loading can take place at all hours. Designed and built by Thomas Steers between 1709 and 1715, his dock could hold a hundred ships and reduced turnaround times for ships from two weeks to four days. Soon augmented by more docks as Liverpool boomed, it was known as the Old Dock.

Ascending into the sun again, our two days in Liverpool were over. We headed home, having had an active and extremely interesting tour of things one can no longer see as well as map collections and Liverpool's marvellous architectural treasures – historic and modern. We thank Tinho da Cruz, for this well-conceived and organized visit and his kind courtesy and thoughtfulness throughout. After this introduction, Liverpool is on my list for a longer visit.