



The History of Liverpool City Centre Shops

Charles Southern explores Church Street and beyond 7-30pm - 17th November

Charles Southern introduced the topic by showing the remains of one of the sanctuary stones near the site of the Liverpool Castle, today the site of the Town Hall and Exchange Flags of the City of Liverpool.

Although there are a series of myths surrounding these stones as a means of protection from your creditors, they delineate the area of the castle market.

It was within this boundary on market day you could not be challenged to pay any of your debts, the theory was a trader who entered the market area was intending on increasing his funds, hence at the end of market trading debts could be paid from the profits of the day.

The presentation then outlined the development of shops and shopping through to the early Victorian era. The changes introduced by such entrepreneurs as Lewis and Jacob who developed their family based businesses to encompass a wider range of goods under one roof and the birth of the department store, complete with roof garden restaurants and areas for customers to relax and savour the “Shopping Experience”

The first Blacklers store consumed by fire in 1886 reopened with Electric Lighting and sumptuous surroundings and a marketing strategy based on a one stop approach catering for all needs. The rival Lewis’s organisation took the display of goods to a new level by using the windows as a place to attract customers into their retail Shangri la. The use of the manikin dummy, (Often thought to be dead bodies covered in plaster) further enhanced trade and curiosity and because of their inactivity the birth a local jibe “Stop standing there like one of Lewis’s!”

Throughout the early years of the twentieth century these giants of the city were developed, changed to meet not only the needs of the rich and famous, they gained market share by popularising the need to shop at their store to meet the rich and famous and follow the social trends of the time. The need to develop market share was paramount, to develop the high-end market the Lewis organisation imported the Bon- Marche style of shopping from Paris. It heralded the introduction of the Christmas grotto, which was spread to most city centre large stores, and was maintained up to the 1970's as the centre piece of the Christmas sales drive

During owners and managers changed with the passing of time, but the retail magnets of the day sponsored philanthropic projects to support the wider customer base.

Davis Lewis provided accommodation for incomers to the city until they found suitable employment, a hospital to heal and theatres to entertain.

Bold Street was the last bastion of the little specialist shop. The customers who frequent the stores of this thoroughfare were the very rich who were expected to be dressed accordingly if they were to be allowed to enter. Even in the postwar era it was not unknown for staff to be sent home if they did not pass muster before allowed on to the sales floor. The police would be called to ensure unsavoury or badly dressed window shoppers were not loitering in the shopping precincts of the rich

World War 2 and the Luftwaffe bombing raids caused extensive damage to the city, but even William Brooke Joyce, (Lord Haw Haw) could not encourage the Liver birds into flight, or our shops to cease trading.

The majority of city centre stores devised ways to continue trading by using temporary sites and moving to safer areas on the fringes of the inner city.

Blacklers split their stock across a few small shops throughout the town centre. After the war, they rebuilt the store, but without their famous glass roof, claiming centre stage with a fabulous grotto and a enormous Santa, who still survives today, thanks to Redman who sponsored the necessary renovation. Santa and the famous Rocking horse reside in the Liverpool Museum of Life.

The Presentation concluded with a role call of the shops fondly remembered by the people of the city and surrounding areas, the list is by no means complete but includes some personal high lights.

TJ Hughes: twin Stores on London Road; famous for the Pinky and Perky Grottos and the Dancing Water Displays

FW Woolworths: based on the American 5 and 10 cent store, the first shop in the UK because he liked Liverpool and its people

The Tatler Cinema; where children watched cartoons and parents slid away to shop

Jack Sharps ; A real Sports shop Owned by the Lancashire Cricketeer and Everton Player

The Byron Street Co-op where you claimed your dividend and much more

Beaverbrook's; the Jewellers ?

Colliers The Outfitters; across the road from TJ'S

Coopers; a real Coffee House corner of White Chapel

Rushworth and Drapers; Music of all types and sounds

NEMS; Music, where Epstein signed the Beatles

Littlewoods; department store

C&A's; Stylish Cloths

Hendersons Department stores

House of Fraser up market department stores

Browns Jewellers; still have the watch

And don't forget **THE WIZARDS DEN!**

In Conclusion : Our thanks to Charles Southern for a nostalgic stroll down Memory Lane

W. Harrison

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