

Friends of Lytham Hall

Newsletter

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Snowdrop Walks

The Snowdrop walks have once again proved a popular event on the local calendar and were lovely this year. Healthy crowds were rewarded with a really nice display of snowdrops and, on a couple of the Sundays, really nice weather. The Hall itself looked fresh following a fresh coat of paint to the front. The high visibility of the Friends also paid dividends with the recruitment of a number of new members

Thanks go to all the people who volunteered to help during the month, whether on the gate or in the Café and especially on the day when over two thousand people came through the gates - one can only imagine the queues at the Café! Although for those that managed to get a bowl of the wonderful 'Fiona Mackay' Vegetable soup, the queuing was probably worth it.

Forthcoming events

Summer Lunch at the Hall – July 2nd

Our annual Summer Buffet Lunch will this year form part of the 10th Anniversary celebrations of the inception of the Friends. For this reason it will be staged at Lytham Hall on Sunday 2nd July.

The intention is to hold the event outside but to have indoor facilities on standby. The Hall should provide a lovely backdrop to the event and the occasion will give an excellent opportunity for members to catch up on progress at the Hall.

Ticket prices are not yet known but will be slightly more expensive than previous years (£10-£12). Numbers are limited but members can reserve tickets by contacting Marilyn Smith on (01253) 734804

Recent Events

Christmas Fair

Thanks to those that turned out for the Friends Autumn Fair on Sat. 26th November at the Assembly Rooms, Lytham.

It was a shame that the event clashed with a number of others similar fund raising events; this meant that numbers were down on previous years. Nevertheless the regular stalwarts turned out and after a lot of cajoling and coaxing we managed to squeeze out £232 profit for the cause. This year we will be taking extra measures to ensure that the event gets a better support, not least by moving the date forward a week.

Star of the show on this day was the turn-out on the flower stall. Not content with Christmas Poinsettias and two shades of Cyclamen, Pam & Charlie Greenhill supplied some lovely Orchids – mine kept their original flowers for over three months!

Thanks to those who did turn out and to all those who donated prizes and articles for sale. Thanks also to all those that helped on the day, and especially Tom Eccles who once again supported the event by selling and signing Christmas cards.

Evening of Christmas Cheer

This evening of Christmas Cheer proved exactly why event has become firmly fixed on the local social calendar.

The evening, as normal went like clockwork, apart from running out of change at the Bar, over £100 of float went in about half an hour – does nobody carry anything less than a £20 note? The drinks reception in front of a log fire in the main hall is always popular, and Rowleys put on an excellent meal in the west wing.

Don Sheerin once again managed to pull together a commendable evening's entertainment, this time under the most trying of conditions. Poor Don, himself under the weather, had no fewer than six people cry off with an assortment of ailments (mainly flu) right up and including the day of the event. It was a wonder how relaxed and calm he came

across once the performance began

Thanks to all those who supported the night and who spent so generously on raffle tickets. A special thank you goes to the people who worked so hard to set up the evening and to the committee members and Friends who helped out during and after the event. The £1,037 made on the evening goes straight into the Friends savings account.

Dates for your Diaries

Annual General Meeting – 19th September
The *Friends of Lytham Hall* AGM will be held at the Assembly rooms Lytham on Tuesday 19th September 2006 at 7:30pm.

Xmas Fair – Saturday 18th November.
Assembly Rooms Lytham. 10.00-12.00pm.

Evening of Xmas Cheer – 8th December
Make a date in your diary for this most popular event

Events at the Hall

Outdoor Theatre

There are a number of events planned at the Hall this year, the most popular of which is a return of outdoor theatre. This year we will be treated to no less than three productions:

- 17th June - Macbeth
- 4th August - Pride and Prejudice
- 2nd September - Wind in the Willows

Heritage Open days

7th - 10th September. The very popular Heritage Open days will this year be spread over four days.

Ticket and admission information for events at the Hall will be available shortly. See local press for details, or alternatively contact the Hall.

Volunteers will be needed at all the events at the Hall. For those interested in helping at some or any of these events they should contact Fiona at the Hall (01253) 736652

Memories of the Hall

Following our appeal for information on Guardian Assurance's involvement on Lytham Hall Geoff Hayman has sent in a very detailed report on the subject. Geoff worked at the hall from 1967 to 1971 as a member of the Overseas Accounts Department and again from 1975 to 1977 as a member of UK Accounts. His account includes recollections from Ernie Bore, Trevor Taylor and others. He writes:

Guardian Assurance Company was formed in 1821 and from 1921 its Head Office was at 68, King William Street in the City of London in an imposing building facing directly across London Bridge. By the 1950s it was one of the largest insurance companies in the United Kingdom, judged on volume of business. However this was a period of expansion and more room was needed to house the Head Office staff. They acquired the adjoining bank premises and also offices in Shoe Lane and Leonard Street, both in the City of London.

It was in the early sixties that further expansion was required to house a computer. For these early huge machines, the cleaner the air the better and so the company looked around for locations away from cities, even asking the staff for suggestions. At about the same time, the government was encouraging companies to move out to provincial locations, partly to alleviate London commuters' travel problems and partly to provide employment in areas away from London.

Perhaps by chance it was about this time that Squire Clifton of Lytham Hall who had borrowed heavily from the company on the security of his Lytham estates was persuaded that he was facing huge financial problems and finally sold the Hall, its park and much of the surrounding land to Guardian. With many acres on which to develop and no rents to pay, the company built a computer centre by the railway in 1962. They were able to attract good staff to augment those who had transferred from London and it was so

successful that it was decided to transfer elements of the Life Department from Shoe Lane in London and accommodate them in the empty rooms at the Hall until such time as room could be found for them elsewhere in the Lytham complex.

The rooms occupied at the Hall were mostly on the first floor. The Life Department were there only a couple of years before they moved into the upper floors of the computer block (known to the company as ABC block). One must assume that the use of the Hall was financially successful for as soon as the Life Department moved out in 1967, the Overseas Department moved in with again some London staff augmented with locally recruited employees. Again the rooms on the first floor (including the Long Gallery) were those mainly used with in addition the ground floor room immediately on the right of the front entrance being used for a post room. Later, rooms on the second floor, included paneled ones were put to use but the main ground floor rooms were left as they were.

From 1971 when, following the merger with Royal Exchange Assurance, the Overseas Department were moved to Ipswich, the hall was not used again by main departments but only by small units whose work had little connection with the main computer-reliant departments. One room was used by three or four people of the Estates Department which included two draughtsmen whose jobs included vetting planning applications on local leasehold land for which the company still held the freehold.

The West Wing, which was much used for storage of old tabulations, accounts and documents (as were the stable building), was converted into a training centre and the people in charge of the training were transferred from Ipswich. In 1990, the company transferred their archives which included documents and records going well back into the previous century from London to Lytham and these were housed in the West Wing under the control of the company

archivist Christine Lillystone. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, retirement courses attended by employees from all over the UK were held at Lytham Westcliffe site but in the evening those who were being retired were entertained to dinner at the Hall (in the main dining room) and were given a conducted tour of the main hall, which was much appreciated.

Open days were at one time held in the grounds with the building open to the public and outside there were fairground attractions, appearances by TV stars and others from Blackpool shows, and stalls provided by local charities. These events were very popular and often raised as much as £30,000 for the charities. In 1990 two young boys were attacked in the nearby countryside on the day of the open event and subsequently we were asked by the BBC Crimewatch programme to re-stage our open event in order that it might prompt memories of unusual behaviour or incidents. There was a magnificent response from the stars and the charities and it all went very well. The BBC presence was very low profile but of course only short extracts were shown. The only follow-up was a call from the BBC asking us the name of the company who had supplied the marquees.

When the property was eventually sold, some lucrative offers were received from people with the apparent intention of making the hall a private residence or residences, but these were rejected in favour of a sale at a lower price where the public could still at times see the building and its contents.

It is interesting to consider why a large business concern should take a paternal interest in an old building like Lytham Hall. In the course of its normal insurance business, investment in property and expenditure on its maintenance was a major part but it was either to generate income in the form of rents or for resale at a profit at a later date. It is doubtful if either consideration was a motive for the company. They never showed any real sign of promoting it as a tourist attraction. In

about 1990, the managing director of the time said to me “What is to be done with the hall?” which seemed to indicate that he, and presumably the board of directors, had no definite plans. It may be that when Squire Clifton sold out to them in 1963 they felt they should continue to express the same benevolent influence over the town that the Cliftons had for many years and maintenance of the property was one way of manifesting this.

Please keep sending in your own **Memories of the Hall**, whether they are personal stories about Lytham Hall or about one of its inhabitants; it all helps to piece together what life was like when the Hall was a lived in property.

Alternatively, if you know someone else that you know had some association with the Hall, please ask them to get in touch - or write in on their behalf. A phone call (728186) or something written down on paper would be appreciated.

Silver Tray



We have come into the possession of a lovely solid silver tray complete with the Clifton hand and dagger motif. The tray which we believe to be a card salver is very plain in design, about 15” in diameter with a one inch lip and set on three tapered legs. The hand & dagger motif is etched into the middle of the tray. It was made in 1898 by William J Barnard, a London silversmith. We are hoping to do some more research into it to try

and ascertain which Clifton commissioned it.

It came into our possession through the help of one of our members. Although himself a great admirer of the plate the donor, who wishes to remain anonymous, felt that it belonged at the Hall and, by making a very generous donation, made it possible to return it to its rightful home. We look forward to seeing it at the Hall although a secure display cabinet will have to be found first.

The Friends would like more items like this returned to the Hall and are asking all members to keep a look-out for anything that might originate from the Hall.

Bill Makin

We are sorry to record the death, aged 93, of a stalwart member of the Friends, Bill Makin. A retired architect, Bill was a volunteer steward at Lytham Hall for very many years and was always interested in what was going on. He has made generous donations to the Friends of Lytham Hall, and recently funded the re-building of the old kitchen chimney and opening up of the fireplace on behalf of the Friends, wishing to remain anonymous at the time. He had hoped to help fund the restoration of the gothic privy in the grounds and we hope that this project will still go ahead. He was outspoken and took great exception to the modern glass door to the refurbished room in the west wing. We'll miss him

Volunteer Required

We have a requirement for a Postie for one of our rounds – Area D. This is a small round of 21 newsletters, in Ansdell that covers the Central Drive, Albany Road area.

If you can spare a little time once every three months please phone any of the committee at the end of the newsletter.

Who said that!

Continuing with our series of articles that attempt to explain where unusual sayings originated:

BLACK MARKET

In medieval England there were nomadic mercenaries who wandered the country side and would sell their services to the highest bidder. These were hardened fighters who lived solitary lives in the wilderness. They did not have the luxury of servants to polish their armour and it would oxidize to a blackish hue, and they came to be known as black knights. At local town festivals they would have exhibition jousting matches in which the winner of the fight would win the loser's weapons and armour. The local gentry, softened by the good life, would lose to these black knights. The nomadic knights didn't have much use for an extra set of armour and would sell it back to them immediately after the fight. The losing nobility would be forced to buy back their armour and this after market came to be known as the "Black Market".

FROG IN YOUR THROAT

Medieval physicians believed that the secretions of a frog could cure a cough if they were coated on the throat of the patient. The frog was placed in the mouth of the sufferer and remained there until the physician decided that the treatment was complete.

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