

The Twentieth Century Society North West Group

Chair's Report 2017

The North West Group have had a busy year in 2017, with a number of successful tours and high profile pieces of casework.

Tours

For our first tour of 2017 we ventured to the affluent Manchester suburb of Hale. This was because Hale has one of the highest number of Edgar Wood houses in the country, and some of his grandest and most unusual designs. Also on this walking tour, we visited the lovely post war church of Holy Angels, which disappointingly was turned down for listing a few years ago. In contrast, in early summer we had a walking tour round central Liverpool and Birkenhead to look at its inter war architectural gems associated with Herbert Rowse and the Liverpool School of Architecture. We saw the majesty of his former Martin's Bank HQ and the magnificent neo-classical shopping arcade in his India Buildings, but both sadly looked a little forlorn. We looked at some of Liverpool's grandest commercial buildings, showing Liverpool's status as a global city. We ended the day by passing through the road tunnel under the Mersey to visit the brooding and monumental brick deco ventilation tower for the Mersey tunnels, by Rowse that wouldn't look out of place in Gotham City. A more intimate tour in the Autumn was a walking tour of some buildings by Roger Stephenson, introduced by the architect. This included his impressive new building for Chetham's School of Music, including a new concert hall, of pale brown brick in a style reminiscent of the brick expressionist buildings of the early twentieth century in the Netherlands and Germany. Later in the day some of us visited a lovely house by Stephenson, in Hale. We are always grateful when the owners of special houses show us round, to get rare glimpses of what are private spaces.



New Building for Chetham's School of Music



One of Rowe's ventilation towers (Birkenhead)

For our summer coach trip, we collaborated with the Tile and Architectural Ceramics Society to visit five inter war Roman Catholic churches in Greater Manchester with substantial schemes of mosaic by Eric Oppenheimer. This was a rare opportunity to visit these churches, guided by a leading expert on Oppenheimer, Robert Field. Some of these churches were humble affairs externally, not indicating the breath taking schemes of mosaics to the interior. The grand exception was the giant St John the Baptist, Rochdale, with its concrete dome modelled on Hagia Sophia, Istanbul. Sadly though, we weren't able to fully explore the interior because a small part of the ceiling had recently fallen down- but this is an important thing about tours, where we can also become aware of the condition of cherished buildings, as well as the joy of exploring them.

2018 marks the centenary of Manchester-based sculptor, Mitzi Cunliffe (designer of the BAFTA award) and as a new thing for us, we have collaborated with the Modernist Society to crowd-fund money for a plaque at her former home in Didsbury as well as planning other events. This is proving to be a real success and we will now be able to organise fitting events to remember this important public sculptor.



Mitzi Cunliffe (1918-2006)

Casework

There have been a number of high profile cases that the North West Group has been involved with in 2017. One that made the national press was the proposal by former footballers, Gary Neville and Ryan Giggs together with *make* architects to erect two black towers by Manchester Town Hall, necessitating the demolition of a neo-classical 1930s former police headquarters and a 1950s synagogue. Fortunately, after much opposition this scheme has been scrapped. A new scheme, with a lighter Seifert-esque diablo shaped tower has recently been passed by Manchester City Council. It's still not ideal though, give the sensitive site. Another high profile case has been the proposed redevelopment of Preston Bus Station, that was saved from destruction by a successful application to list by a C20 member a few years ago. Whilst originally the planned 'youth zone' was to be attached to the beautiful sweeping concrete front, under revised plans this will be detached from the building, preserving the lovely line of the façade. We were also concerned when the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salford announced that is proposed to close half of its churches, which would disproportionately affect post 1914 buildings. Fortunately, following enquiries, Historic England has begun its process of surveying these churches for listing and to date has resulted in the listing of two post war churches, St Mary's in Denton with its sweeping 1960s parabolic concrete roof and St Mary's Failsworth, another 1960s gem in modern basilica style with a striking drill-head like concrete steeple to the front. Finally, we have been watching with concern at Liverpool City Council's continuing inappropriate redevelopments that are jeopardising its UNESCO World Heritage status. The demolition of the 1912 Futurist Cinema in 2016 was a disaster and we will need to continue to keep a close eye on proposed redevelopments in what is an internationally recognised historic area.

St Mary's RC Church, Failsworth- newly Grade II listed



Matthew Schofield April 2018

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