

The Story of Kirkdale

Jacko & Burnsy visit the Rotunda Heritage Centre

'Look at that, mate. Rural, Everton Valley, you wouldn't believe it would you?' Jacko shook his head in disgust.

'Wouldn't believe what?' Burnsy shrugged his shoulders and looked down at the well under his feet, quickly stepping off the toughened glass.

'They messed it up big time. Left it in a right state'

'Who did?'

'The fat cats, the money men.'

'What are you ranting about now, Jacko?'

'They lived in a holiday resort with the beach on their doorstep – Sandhills beach – and that was before there was any such thing as a holiday. How the other half live, hey.'

'You're just jealous.'

'It's not right, mate. The rich have it cushy while the poor struggle to make ends meet. It's like Cameron and his Big Society! D'you know he said Jesus invented the Big Society and he was just continuing God's work. The pure front of it. I don't know what world he's in but it's not ours!

'You just like moaning, Jacko.'

Jacko pointed at the picture of the ship above Everton Valley. 'Liverpool was doing alright anyway for shipping trade but it went off the scale when the slave trade started. Deffo made a huge contribution to the wealth and power of the Britain we see now. Did you know the slave owners got compo to the tune of 83 million quid when it was eventually stopped - for loss of trade! A bloke called John Gladstone pulled that one off and then set up another system to get Indians to sign their rights away straight after to make up for it! Unbelievable.'

'Yeah, you can say that but what about the money it brought in? It fed our family for generations. We were brought up in Cotton Street; my mum worked in Tates – sugar, Aunt Margi worked at the BA..tobacco, and Uncle Gerard was a docker. They were never short of fags. That said, that's probably why I smoke. Mmm, I've never really made them connections before.'

'My point is that your family lived opposite Clarence Dock

GT. MERSEY STREET

In the 1820s this house was a family home for a powerful merchant with stables and servants quarters



Kirkdale Gaol

was a grim prison... word treatment... 130 prisoners... mill there. Many... took place in the...

The canal

and the merchants moved theirs to mansions in Sefton Park.

Jacko cocked his head at the Leeds, Liverpool canal painting. 'That fed the cotton industries in Manchester, Stockport and north west towns that canal. It was the M6 of its day. Dodgy though. Loads of robberies. The complete opposite of now, all quiet and used for a walk or bike ride. Ah, the tranquil benefits of manufacturing moving abroad..'

'Here you go, see that Bank Hall there. Looks amazing but the Moore family who owned it weren't so perfect. One of them lost it through gambling debts and tax dodging. They get a bit of criticism while there were people in jail for begging, being out late, stealing or swearing on a Sunday... I'm not joking mate. They were locked up basically for being poor. Does that sound right to you? Double standards mate.'

'Just goes to show how much things can change.. and how quick really. Well, we needed the merchants and docks and the jobs and that's just how it goes. I love it here. The people are down to earth and sound. It does need some TLC like, you're right on that. With a bit of regenerating it could be amazing again in a different way. Sack the bad and keep the good stuff.'

'Well it's never gonna be a country retreat again is it' Jacko took a deep breath and tapped his finger on the GT. MERSEY STREET sign, reading out loud, In the 1820s this house was a family home for a powerful merchant

with stables and servants quarters.

'I can read you know, Jacko.'

'Guess who that powerful merchant was?'

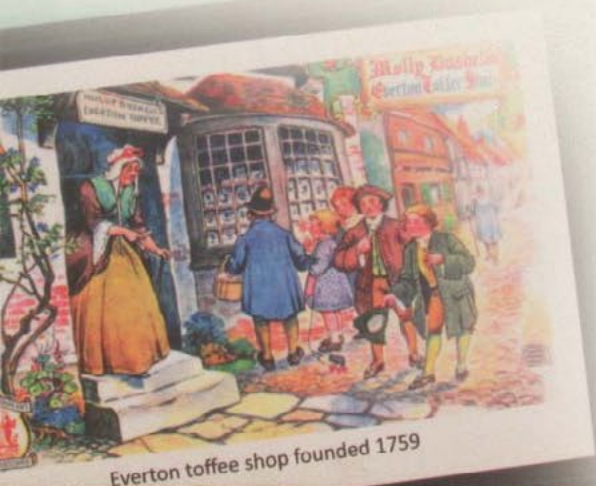
'Been on a history course, have you?'

'It was a heritage course, mate. Anyway, his name was Uriah Davenport and he only went and married a cousin of William Gladstone's, Elizabeth. Do you know who William Gladstone was? Chancellor of the Exchequer and then Prime Minister! Serious clout. He wasn't daft. Marry into that clan and you



1814 Leeds, Liverpool canal

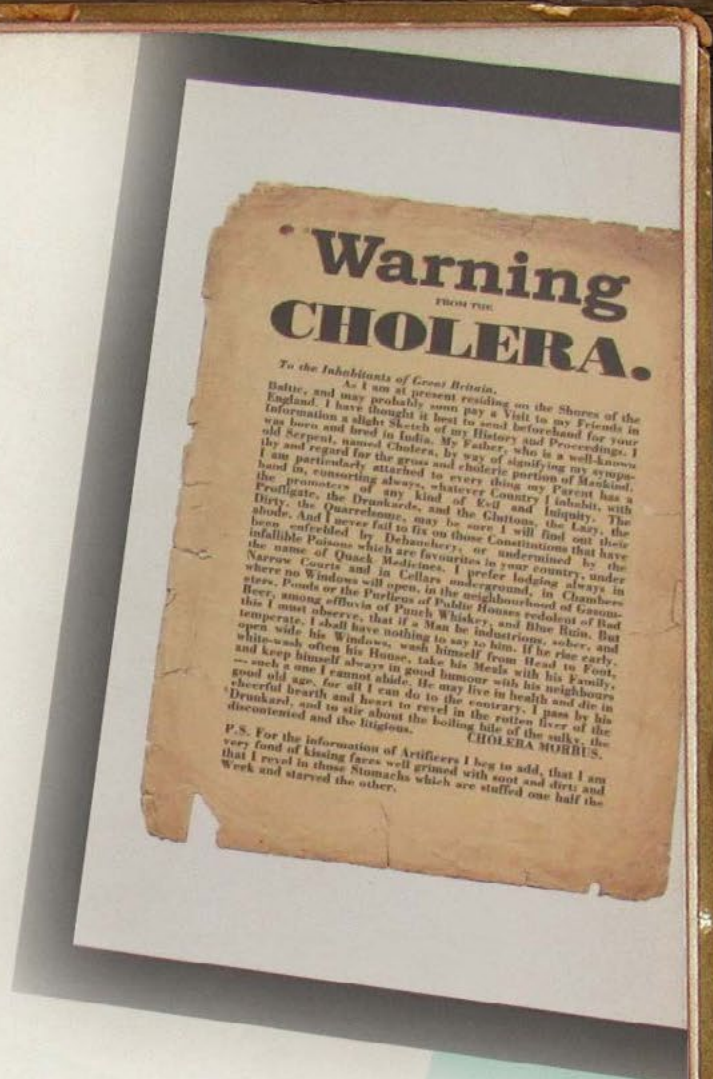
The canal
was the main trade
route before the
roads and railways



Everton toffee shop founded 1759

'What is Cholera?'

that? It's mad isn't it? I remember every Saturday afternoon I'd help me mum carry the weekly wash to the Wash House in St. Domingo's. I didn't mind, once we got there I'd



shoot around to me mates for a few hours; I wasn't hanging around listening to all the gossip. I was made up when we finally got a washing machine though but I think me mum missed the weekly catch up with the other girls to be honest.'

'I know exactly what you mean. I used to walk with my dad to the boozer on wash day and our June and Doreen would give me ma a hand carrying the washing. He always used to say to me he was making the most of it before we caught up with the Yanks and got all the gear at home. He was in the Merchant Navy and always said we were ten years behind the Americans.'

'What about that lot? 1.3 million Irish came through them very gates at Clarence Dock you know, after taking the ship here to get away from the Great Famine in Ireland, and over a million had already died. The refugees of the day. They weren't welcomed by the locals. They were worried their culture was too different and they'd change everything for the worst. Sound familiar?'

'Yeah it does. Have you seen the memorial in the bombed out church?'

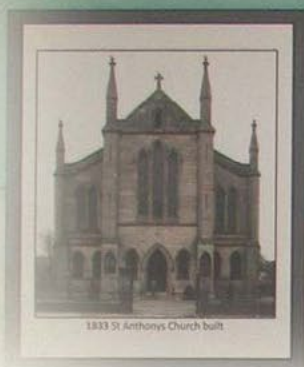
'Yeah but they shouldn't have starved you know. The harbours were closed against importing foreign food but open for exporting Irish grain. The Government's priority was free trade and they made the decision to let the grain still be exported and let them rot basically. A million quid's worth of corn, barley and dairy stuff was exported to Britain from Ireland because free trade meant they got more dough over here than there. That wasn't a Great Famine that was a kind of genocide through starvation.

'Even when they got here they were stuffed. People were dying everywhere. It was survival of the fittest. We're only here because our ancestors survived so they must have been pretty tough, or lucky. It's what's made us what we are today. It's what's given us our unique identity. Seems like everyone here has Irish family.'

Jacko pointed at St. Anthony's Church, 'Have you been in there?'

'I don't do religion. Seen too many arguments and trouble over the years, mate. My dad was a Protestant and me ma a Catholic. They weren't bothered but their parents were. There was blue murder when they got together you know. My granddad went nuts at Mum for bringing a Proddy home but that was because of all the stick me Nan had taken over the years for being Catholic. That was the norm then, sack that, if somebody is alright with me, then I'll be alright back. I couldn't care less what they believe in as long as they're not trying to ram it down my throat. You know what I mean, don't yer?'

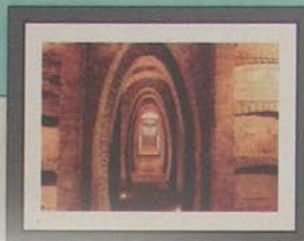
'I'm getting back to my point; you see that picture of Black47? What I was going to say was you want to get yourself down there and look at the catacombs. Anyone can go and have a look you know. They have records of thousands of Irish who died. Father Nightingale's buried down there, he was the first of ten priests to die from



1833 St Anthony's Church built



1835 St George's Hall build begins



The Irish that survived the journey, starvation, disease and prejudice helped to shape Liverpool's culture today especially in the North

DUBLIN STREET

Did you know?
Other crops grew successfully in Ireland during the famine and that poor families who grew mainly potatoes need not have starved. The other crops were exported to Britain under free trade laws with the support of British authorities.



typhus in 1847, they all knew the risks but took the knock getting out into the slums to help the sick.'

'Who's he, Florence's ald fella? What's Typhus anyway?

'A deadly fever caused by bacteria spread by ticks, lice, fleas and stuff. Nice. But really, you want to go and have a look it's a bit spooky though, there's 660 crypts bricked up and a plaque with his name on it and you can read the inscriptions on some of the others, sad though mate, you've got to go and have a look.'

'No ta, mate. I'm not a mole. Before that was there it was the French Chapel but they had to build St. Anthony's to get everyone in as the congregation sky rocketed when all the Irish got here. Anton, a French kid that used to be in our class couldn't wait to fill you in on that one. He was a bore that lad.'

'Yeah, I know. It was called the French Chapel because it was built by a French priest called Father Gerardot doing a runner from France and the original church was a hundred yards away, actually. There's all sorts of stories in churches and all sorts of churches in Liverpool.'

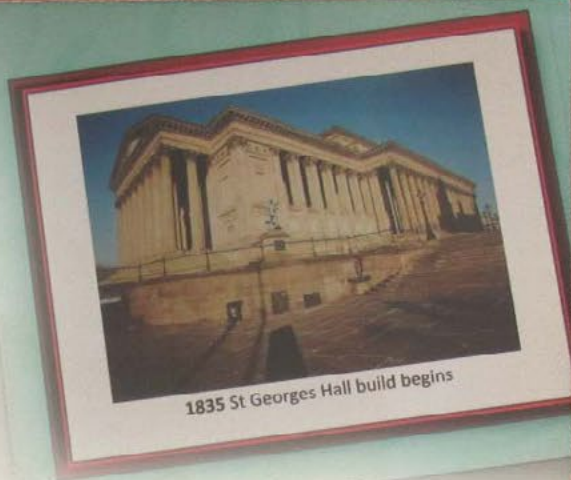
'Yeah, if you walk around the city centre and just listen, you could be absolutely anywhere in the world. We're a Port City. We've always been like that. All port cities are like that. I couldn't imagine it not being like that.'

'I was in St. George's Hall the other day with the grandkids; they do a tour round the building; they loved it, our Matty was in his element down in the cells, they've got photos on the wall of prisoners from the eighteen hundreds, he was checkin' to see if any had his name or looked like him. I worry about that lad sometimes, he's only ten and he insisted on being tried, just like in the olden days. So up he comes from his cell, straight into the court, into

the dock and there's our Lucy sitting in the Judges Chair, waving her hand around, condemning everybody to death by hanging.'

'That's where yer got sentenced then shipped off to Kirkdale or Walton Jail for yer punishment. The council then wanted a music hall but couldn't pay for it so they were made up when Government said each area had to have their own law court, they combined the two. Imagine, one day you could be enjoying a few jars in the Main Hall or Concert Room and the next day yer could be in the same building, getting told by a judge, you'd had it then in the jail listening to everyone having a great time upstairs.'

'I was telling you about the grandkids



Kirkdale Gaol

was a grim prison where the word 'treadmill' originated, as 130 prisoners powered the corn mill there. Many hangings took place in the grounds.

there before you started again. Here's one for your fact file, the first judges for St. George's Hall were robbed at, Stretch's, a boozer here in Kirkdale and they rode into town on horses with the High Sheriff and Mayor and all the other entourage. Imagine the sight.'

'Yeah but imagine what it'd have been like without them. It would have been a free for all, total chaos. Desperate people do desperate things and there were so many people, how do you keep tabs on them?

'But who judges them? Who's watching the watchers? There's as many criminals in their world – amazing what you can get away with in a wig or a suit.'

'We had a boss day anyway, seeing as you're asking. I love seeing the kids' faces when they're excited, their imagination was running riot and they didn't get their phones out once. I was really, really, made up to see them enjoying it and getting involved.'

'I know. Everybody just walks around staring at a screen, they haven't got a clue what's going on around them because they're too wrapped up in their virtual world. Watching band through their phone..you may as well just watch it on telly. Do you know what I do now? I just let them walk into me and hope they drop their phone. They cost a bomb those things, don't they? That'll teach them to watch where they're going.'

'You're an old misery, you are you know.' Burnsy smirked and shook his head.

'When we were kids you'd have got a smack around the head and told to get your head out of the clouds'.

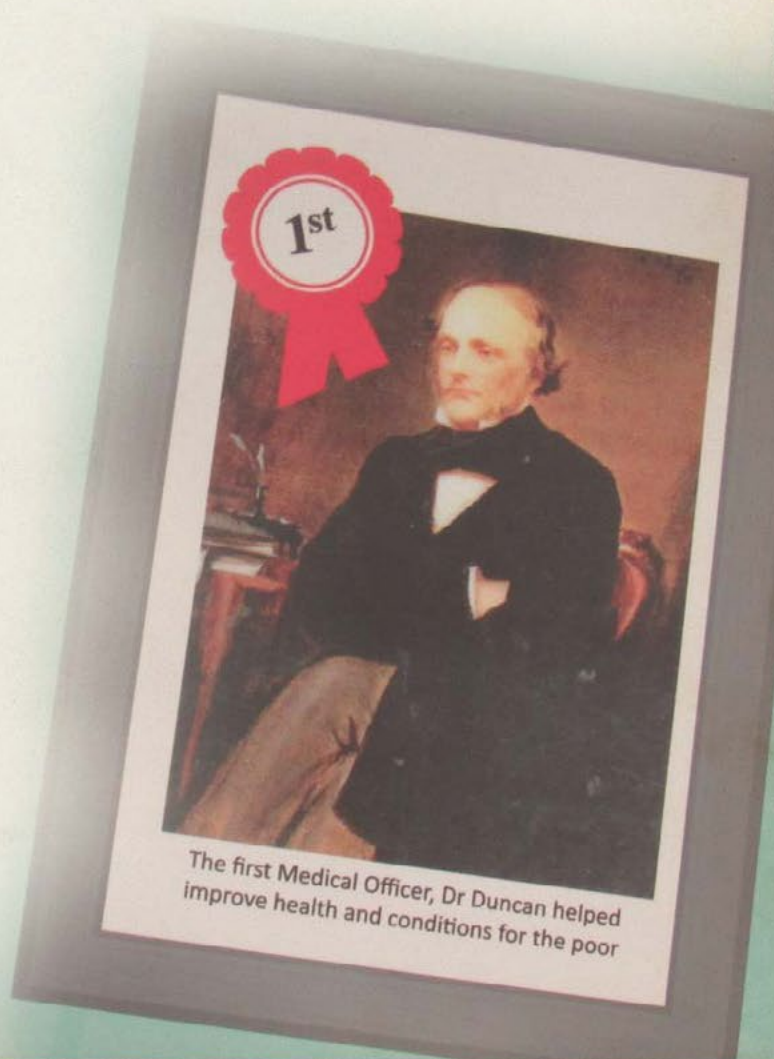
'Its not just young ones though. It's almost everyone now. It's useful but it's like loads of people are hooked on the internet now. I remember when we first got a telly, all the neighbours came over and that changed everything. There was a big panic then in that telly was going to be the ruin of everyone. We always panic over anything new don't we? Just imagine what's in store for the future. I start a basic computer course next month, the grandkids made me promise if they made an effort to understand me then I had to do the same to understand them. Fair enough, I suppose. I'm looking forward to it to be honest.'

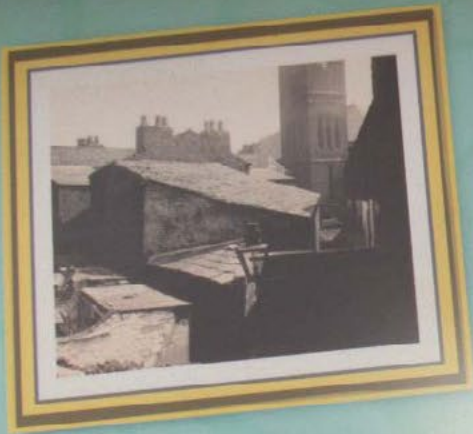
'We've got to keep up with technology, I know that but you it's just happening so fast, isn't it and then changes again'

'Got to keep up with the times, Jacko and keep learning all the time. I bet you've still got one of those Bakelite radios to listen to your music, haven't yer? Can't plug your ear phones into that, can yer?'

'Yeh alright, soft lad. Look at Doctor Duncan there.'

'Who's he the world's smartest pub landlord? Fancy a pint there after?'





'Yeah, it's always a nice pint in there. World's smartest landlord, what are you going on about? He was the world's first Medical Officer of Health. Before him there was no one doing health, it just

wasn't on the agenda. He gave up his

private practices in the north and south of the city to devote all his time and attention to the health of the people. He was a pioneer mate, a great believer in the needs of the poor, especially in the housing conditions they had to put up with. His research and vision to sort out ways for people to keep clean got rid of the breeding ground for the Cholera to spread.'

Housing clearance -
Many slums demolished -
20,000 moved
into already
overcrowded streets

'I'm only winding you up mate. He was born at the top of Seel Street, where The Blue Angel Nightclub is, if you pop into Pogue

Mahone's across the road you can have a pint and read about him on the walls by the

front door.'

'He got the slums demolished. The merchants had turned themselves into property developers. No regulation of standards then though. They could have easily built decent houses for everybody, with the money they'd already made, but no. Why worry about something that's not affecting them? You'd be fuming wouldn't you when you saw the mansions they were building; a stone's throw away from the filth they had to live in.'

'Where did the people go when they got demolished then?'

'Twenty thousand moved into the already heaving streets, it must have been a total nightmare for them. It was out of the frying pan into the fire but at least the government realised they had to do something about it. They built St. Martin's Cottages in 1869; they were the first corpy houses in Britain, a world first in fact. They weren't great but they were better than the slums; it was a start I suppose.'

'It's not that long ago really, is it? We take so much for granted don't we?'

'I never understood why they demolished Bibby's Warehouse in 1989, you know. You'd have thought they'd have turned it into luxury flats or something. They did it with loads of other buildings, didn't they? D'you realise the same fella who designed, The Liver Building, designed Bibby's? They carried on building Bibby's during the First World War because it was considered so important and didn't finish until 1917. If that's not heritage, I don't know what is.'



1848 Bibby's Factory built

'You can't keep everything, can yer? Out with the old and in with the new. That's what I say!'

'Don't fix something if it's not broke. That's what I say. That Jesse Hartley fella had the right idea; he was in charge of the port for thirty six years and built or altered every dock in the city. Can you imagine the north end without the dock wall?'

'I thought you said don't fix something if it's not broke. You're contradicting yourself there mate.'

'I didn't say he fixed it, he made it better. He dealt with the docks as one big system mate by linking them all together through railways, canals and roads and he made it easier and safer for the ships. Talk about building something to last, he couldn't have realised at the time that he'd created a landscape that we be crowned as world heritage site. Genius. I bet he'd have been made up if he could see it today. Imagine if he saw the Albert Dock now, with all the tourists spending their dough, coming to see his creation.'

'He might think it's a tragedy'

'It's the largest group of Grade I listed buildings in the UK, a hundred and sixty years of manmade landscape and still going strong.'

'It was closed in 72 and totally derelict in 81, on its knees. I think it was 84 when they started doing it up, wasn't it? Well it was something like that anyway. I know it was European money that was given for it. Do you remember how grim it was when you went to the Pier Head bus terminus? You got some characters hanging around there didn't yer?

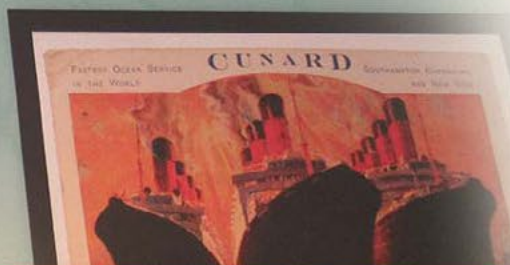
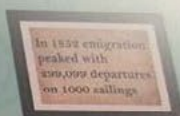
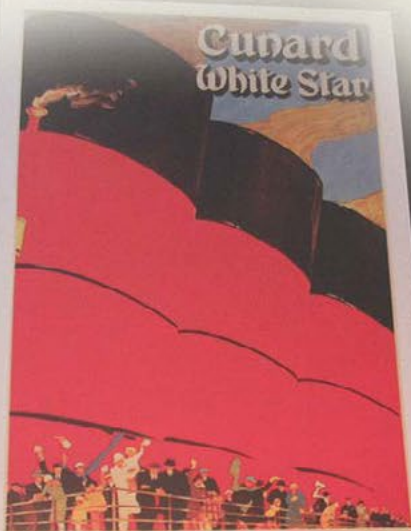
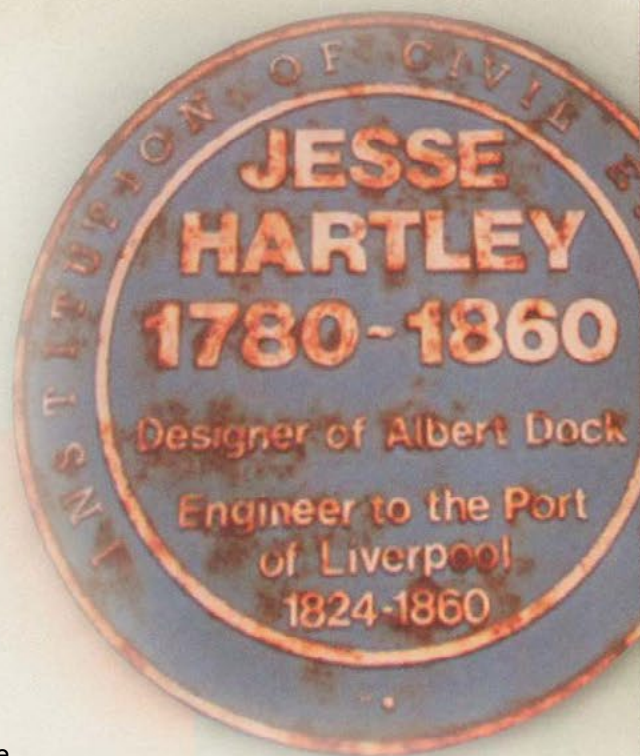
'It's come full circle though, hasn't it? Cunard celebrated 175 years in business and the Three Queens came to Liverpool to salute us. The first ships left for America in 1840 from here, so it's only right isn't it? You've got to remember where it all started haven't you? I'm a firm believer in all that, don't forget your roots, no matter how big you get!'

'I totally agree, mate. I heard on Radio Merseyside the other day that fifty odd ships are came here this year and brought over 70,000 visitors to the city, that'll bring in some dough won't it?'

'Too right, it's a long time coming but better late than never, hey? I just hope it lasts, that's all.'

'Look at those two, mate. They look evil!' Burnsy nudged Jacko's shoulder.

'Well that's wrong for a start! It was 1884 that they were hanged



not 1843 and her name was Margaret Higgins not Mary. They were sisters those two you know. That one there, that Catherine Flannagann, poisoned her own son, John in 1880. He was only twenty two! He was the first to go!

'You are kidding aren't yer?'

'No, she got seventy one quid from the Burial Society, that's six grand today. Yeh mate, they took lodgers in and over the space of three years, four out of the nine that went in ended up six foot under! They weren't just evil Burnsy; they were out and out murderers!'

'Go on, what happened?' Burnsy looked at the sinister looking silhouetted figures on the wall.

'That Margaret married one of the lodgers, Thomas Higgins in 1882. Ah, he had a little girl called Mary. She was only eight you know. She was dead within months of them getting married. After a short illness! The Burial Society paid out again. The next year another lodger, Margaret Jennings died after being sick for a bit, she was nineteen. You've got it, the Burial Society paid out again!'

'You wouldn't want to get on the wrong side of them would yer?'

'The neighbours started gossiping, so they moved to Latimer Street, then to Ascot Street.'

'Come on Jacko, how did they get caught?'

'It was when they bumped off Margaret's husband, Thomas. His brother, Patrick, smelled a rat because he'd only seen Thomas a few days earlier and he'd been the picture of health!'

'Carry on Jacko, this is getting good mate. What did he do?'

'He started digging mate, asking around. He found out that his brother had been insured with five different Burial Societies. They'd have pocketed around a hundred quid, that's nine grand in today's money, more or less.'

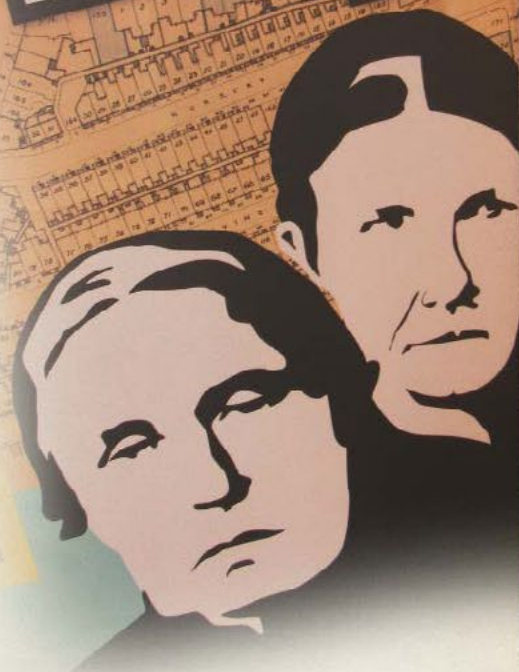
'How did he prove it? You'd have been going mental wouldn't you?' Burnsy said.

'He called in the authorities mate and got a post mortem done. The Death Certificate said Dysentery but after the autopsy they found out he'd been poisoned with arsenic. Cut a long story short, they'd been soaking flypaper in water to extract the arsenic and using it in a solution to poison him. They found it in a bottle in the house! Banged to rights!'

1843 Murderers Mary Higgins and Catherine Flanagan were hanged in Kirkdale Gaol - the 'Black Widows' had waxworks in Madame Tussaud's.

They poisoned tenants and family with arsenic in Skirving Street to get their life insurance pay outs.

They poisoned a family with arsenic in Skirving Street to get their life insurance pay outs.



'Just imagine how many others could have died, Jacko!'

'Apparently they were part of a bigger conspiracy of murder for profit, a network of Black Widows. At the trial, Catherine Flannagan offered to give evidence against others involved for leniency but was knocked back by the judge. This was rife at the time mate! They got what they deserved anyway when they got hanged at Kirkdale Prison.'

'The things some people will do for money!'

'The insurance companies learned their lesson after all this came out and tightened up on the regulations. You could insure people without them knowing about it. It's like anything Burns, if there's a chink in the armour people will exploit it.'

'That's St. Martin's Cottages. I remember when they knocked them down in '77.'

'As I said earlier, they were the first council houses built in Europe. People were coming to Liverpool in their droves. The docks and factories were bustling, a hive of activity Burns. People came from the countryside and all over Ireland. Doctor Duncan and Kitty Wilkinson's efforts to help the working class and improve health and the need for hard working people to be able to live in comfort and bring up their families was why they were built.'

'They needed knocking down though Jacko, hey!'

'It was revolution Burns. Because of Liverpool, social housing got transformed, more councils followed Liverpool's vision, which led to millions enjoying decent housing conditions and getting out of the slums of Victorian times.'

'People are living in overcrowded houses today Jacko.'

'The Government's starting to crack down on private landlords mate.'

'There's housing shortages Jacko. People can be on a waiting list for years so they've got no choice but to rent from private landlords. The horror stories you hear. I don't know it just seems to be on the increase. Have you seen the amount of people on the streets?'

'I'm looking at the positive side of the time. Just imagine getting out of the slums and getting your own place. The people that moved into St. Martin's Cottages must have thought they'd died and gone to Heaven. Picture it, you've got your family into decent digs and look at that, the Rotunda Theatre opened in the same year, fireworks lighting up the sky and a giant magnesium balloon hanging in the air. There must have been such a buzz of optimism floating around mustn't there!'

1869 The Rotunda Theatre
official opening saw
fireworks light the
surrounding streets and a
giant magnesium balloon in
the sky set to classical music



'How long did it last though? Look at the rest of the wall. It seems grim Jacko.'

'Times were changing Burnsy. The Gordon Institute for Boys opened in 1886 to help poor and disadvantaged lads of Liverpool by giving education, recreation and sports facilities so they could live happy and useful lives.'

'Look at those kids there above that League of Welldoers picture. They don't look happy!'

'That's The Lee Jones mate, still going strong today on Limekiln Lane.'

'I know where it is, my Uncle Billy goes there to get a bit of company and something to eat. Most of them are in the same boat there.'

'Do you know when it was set up in 1893 it was known as the Liverpool Food Association to give school meals to kids who were starving? Women volunteers used to take meals to people who were stuck in bed sick because if you didn't work, you didn't have money and no dough meant you'd starve. He fed Dockers waiting for work as well, so it wasn't just about the kids he wanted to help everybody.'

'Hey mate, it's like that now. There are people who are working full time going to food banks to make ends meet!' Burnsy shook his head.

Jacko pointed his finger at the picture of the Building the overhead railway, 'They shouldn't have torn The Ovee down mate. That would be some tourist attraction now wouldn't it?'

'It did its job didn't it and stopped the roads getting blocked, getting cargo to and from the docks, transporting workers to the docks, factories, offices and shops.'

'Ahead of its time Burnsy, it was the first elevated electric railway in the world and the first railway to use an escalator. It was the first to have automatic signals as well you know.'

'I remember my mum taking us when we were kids from Seaforth to Dingle on the Ovee. It was only six miles but she'd point everything out along the way. I remember Tate's Sugar Silo getting built. I had it in my head that it was a secret aircraft base at the time. You're right though Jacko, what a way to see the city that'd be!'

'Tate's, how many thousands of local people did they employ, hey! My Auntie Margie worked there in the war. It was the only job she knew, like loads from around here. When it closed in '81 she was devastated! Everybody was! This area had its heart ripped out!'

