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Forthcoming lecture notices:

19 November, Stephen Shuttleworth, 'The Lancashire gentry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries'. (2pm, zoom)

Steven is a native of Oldham, but for many years has lived in West Berkshire. An environmental scientist/town planner by profession, his final post was as Director of Environment/Head of Planning for an English Council. Since retiring, Steven has spent some of his time researching his family history, which has rekindled his long standing interest in the socio-economic history of Lancashire. His talk will explore who were 'the gentry'; the huge variations in their wealth, land ownership, and their role in society; the debate about the 'rise and fall' ir the gentry in general; what we know (or think we know) about the Lancashire gentry; and then consider how these issues are reflected in the story of his ancestors, the Shuttleworths of Asterley, near Whalley.

18 February 2026, Maurice Handley, 'Mapping Newcome-type engines during the eighteenth century in Prescot and Whiston'.

11 March 2026, following the AGM, Sam Wetherell will speak on Liverpool and the Unmaking of Britain.

21 October 2026, Daisy Jones, a 2024 research grant recipient, will speak on her doctoral research on women and Cheshire country houses.

18 November 2026, Helen Cooke, from Nantwich Museum, will speak on 'A seventeenth-century Nantwich apothecary's tale'.

St Mary's Year 5 Visit to Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral

Thanks to the generous support of the Historic Society of Lancashire & Cheshire, our Year 5 pupils recently took part in a memorable and enriching visit to the Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King. The £300 grant awarded by the Society helped significantly towards covering the cost of the trip, enabling all pupils to participate.

The aim of the visit was to immerse the children in Liverpool's rich historical, cultural, and religious heritage, in support of our history curriculum and wider spiritual development programme. Pupils explored the Cathedral's architecture, its links to key events in the city's past, and its role in the Catholic community.

The children were deeply engaged throughout. One pupil said, "I never knew the Cathedral was so modern and full of meaning. It helped me understand more about my faith and my city." Another added, "I liked learning about the symbols and history inside – it felt peaceful but also powerful."

We are very proud of how the pupils represented St Mary's and grateful to the Society for helping make this special opportunity possible. It was a day that will leave a lasting impression on all who took part.

— Miss Baxter, St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Leyland

Year 5 pupils from St Mary's Catholic Primary School on the steps of the Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral, reflecting on a day of learning, worship, and history.

Students at Great Marsden St. John's Primary, during Viking Study Day

Viking Study Day at Great Marsden St. John's Primary, Nelson - Recipient of an HSLC educational grant.

Our experience with the Viking Man was incredible. The children were inquisitive and were encouraged to ask questions to deepen their own understanding. The Viking Man was excellent at answering all their questions in a fun and exciting way. Children who are usually quiet and disengaged were excited and joining in with conversations and even putting their hands up to answer questions! The Viking Man also covered topics that we do not cover in our scheme of work such as the Viking gods and burials, so he was also developing their subject knowledge.

Lecture Reports:
'Rockets, Lions and Planets: the significance of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway', by Professor Paul Salveson, 19th February 2025

Professor Paul Salveson made a very welcome return to our lecture series in February. He provided a fascinating insight into the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway in 1830, exploring the significance of the earlier Lancashire colliery tramways, and, more immediately, the Bolton and Leigh Railway, opened with great celebrations two years earlier. Initially delayed by powerful vested interests, and its opening marred by the tragic

death of William Huskisson, Liverpool and Manchester Railway enjoyed much success. Unlike the Bolton and Leigh development, it was built to carry passengers between the two major cities; freight carriage came later. It benefited from proper signalling, good infrastructure, and well-trained staff, and it generated much passenger business, which led to the creation of branch lines, including those running north to Carlisle and Glasgow. The Liverpool and Manchester Railway formed, therefore, the beginning of a national rail network, establishing it as more significant than the earlier Stockton and Darlington development, and in 1880 its fiftieth anniversary was a major event, featuring a pageant in Liverpool involving thousands of children.

The 2030 bicentenary celebrations are currently in planning, chaired by Professor Salveson. The project, appropriately known as 'Rocket: All Aboard', is exploring ways of opening access to the railway's historic sites, and careful consideration is being given to the anniversary's legacy beyond 2030.

For more information see https://manchesterhistories.co.uk/projects/rocket-200/

A recording of the lecture can be accessed via the Society's website.

Dr Fiona Pogson

'Green Belts in Merseyside: A Bourgeois Conspiracy Against the Urban Proletariat?!', by Professor John Sturzaker, 19th March 2025

This year's AGM lecture was given by the Ebenezer Howard Professor of Planning, Professor John Sturzaker of Hertfordshire University. John's lecture fused three individual strands. First, a general overview of the development of greenbelts at a national level; second, the political process that led to the creation of greenbelts in the aftermath of the Second World War; third a retrospective commentary on their ongoing utility as well as challenges to the same. Noting initial Elizabethan proposals for a green belt around London, John's talk quickly moved to the specifics of the wider-Merseyside region and the varied 'development plans' put forward for both Lancashire and Cheshire in the immediate aftermath of the war. Commenting on how these were also grounded in the political realities of a more planned economy that sought to disperse industry and populations alongside the creation of new towns, John provided members with a series of glimpses into both the political process by which Liverpool's and the wider area's greenbelts became a reality, and historic and ongoing public discourses into the protection of the same. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the subject matter, a lively Q&A session followed.

Dr Bertie Dockerill

Strikers and 'Knobsticks': Intimidation and Violence During the Preston Strike and Lock-Out of 1853–1854, by Dr Lewis Darwen, 23rd April 2025

In this online talk, Dr Lewis Darwen challenged the idea that the Preston Strike and Lock-Out (which began as a strike, became a lock-out and then continued as a strike) was a peaceful dispute, with little violence or intimidation. This narrative appears in the journalism of Charles Dickens, in the Times, in local histories and in the 1983 study of the dispute, 'Ten Per Cent and No Surrender', by Dutton and King.

Dr Darwen emphasised that most of the workers involved in the dispute were young women, and focused on two episodes of intimidation reported in the local press in September 1853, during the strike phase. Alexander Kay, an older man, was jostled and verbally abused on his way home from work by a crowd of girls and boys, and in a separate incident a 20-year-old strikebreaker, Mary Leonard, was attacked on leaving her mill, thrown to the ground twice, jostled and verbally abused. It took two hours for her to get home, a journey that would normally have taken 15 minutes.

The magistrates sent a number of young boys and men to prison for the attacks, but perhaps more significantly, such assaults served as a warning to 'knobsticks' (a Northern term of abuse for blacklegs or scabs) of the consequences of going against the collective.

Once the mill owners closed their workplaces in October 1853, cases of violence ceased (even would-be strikebreakers were locked out). But when the mills reopened in January and February 1854, large crowds of strikers gathered outside or near each mill, and strikebreakers were escorted by police. Many strikers, including women, were arrested for obstruction and for shouting 'knobstick'. The intimidation escalated in late February when the masters tried to import 'knobstick' labour from outside Preston, culminating in a serious disturbance on the night of 2 March 1854, when coaches taking Kirkby Lonsdale strikebreakers from the railway station to the mills of the Leigh brothers were attacked. Further gatherings were banned by magistrates the following day.

Dr Darwen concluded that the Preston dispute, and others in the 1850s (the early days of industrial, factory-based trade unionism) were indeed peaceful in comparison to the revolutionary fervour of previous decades. But he argued that intimidation, and the threat of violence, was important in maintaining strike discipline. Part of this intimidation was the use of the strong insult, 'knobstick', which 'othered' the strikebreakers and promoted solidarity amongst strikers.

Dr Andrew Hobbs

''The Sinking of the Lusitania - Murder or Misfortune', Mike Stammers Memorial Lecture, by Peter Elson, 7th May 2025

It was a beautiful evening when we gathered at the Museum of Liverpool on 7 May 2025, to listen to Peter Elson deliver the 2025 Mike Stammers Memorial Lecture. An auspicious date, because it marked 110 years since the sinking of RMS Lusitania, the subject of Peter's lecture. Peter presented a very richly illustrated talk with some 70 slides accompanying the presentation. He began by setting the historical context of Cunard from the initial founding of the shipping line by Samuel Cunard and its early success gaining the coveted and lucrative mail contract to transport the Royal Mail across the Atlantic. Peter then explored the Line's connections with Liverpool, its notable personalities, and their homes around the great port city. We were treated to slides showing Lusitania's construction and photographs of Lusitania in berth on the River Mersey which allowed us to appreciate the sheer size of the ship and how it dwarfed the surrounding buildings and all other craft on the Mersey. We were further entertained by snippets from some of Cunard's famous passengers; notably Charles Dickens who had described his first-class cabin on an early Cunard voyage as being akin to 'a coffin'. Not so for those who travelled later. By the early twentieth century, liners such as Lusitania were the last word in luxury and fashion as illustrated through slides of the vessel's richly decorated interior.

Peter moved on to explore Lusitania's sinking and to answer the question, was it 'Murder or Misfortune?' which caused the great ship to sink on 7 May 1915. The scene was set with the growing antagonisms between the Great Powers in the build up to World War One and, as explained by Peter, passengers traversing the Atlantic were given notice by the Imperial German Embassy that, once war was declared, the Atlantic was a war zone and that British and Allied ships were liable to destruction. Perhaps that warning should have been enough but, as a passenger liner (apparently without mounted guns), there was an assumption that the ship would be exempt from German naval action. What is known, and agreed by all, is that Lusitania was the target of a torpedo attack by a German U-Boat and that this attack caused the great liner to sink off the coast of Ireland. But what has fascinated historians ever since is why the ship sank so quickly, causing such devasting loss of life. One theory put forward and explored by Peter is the two-torpedo theory. Eyewitnesses spoke of two explosions and some even recounted seeing two torpedoes in the water. No official reports, British or German, mention two torpedoes. Instead, the second explosion has been

variously explained by the more benign 'theory of the torpedo and initial explosion hitting the boiler room which caused a second explosion and wreaked devastation. An alternative theory, and a much more damning one, is that the ship was carrying vital munitions to the UK, its passengers in effect a human shield, and that it was this cargo that caused a secondary explosion on board. Conspiracy theories have raged ever since surrounding a 'cover up' of the two-torpedo theory, the issue of a covert military cargo or a deliberate attempt by Churchill to bring about the sinking of a passenger liner carrying US citizens to bring the US into World War One.

Peter closed his talk by exploring some of the personal stories of loss and tragedy. These stories were all the more moving and poignant to me since just before the lecture I had wandered over to the site of Lusitania's propeller, adjacent to the Museum, and saw the flowers and wreaths left earlier that day by those remembering the loss of the ship and mourning its dead. Peter's lecture was very well received and greatly appreciated by the large audience that gathered to listen to the tenth Mike Stammers Memorial Lecture. Perhaps Peter will tell us more when we mark the 120th anniversary.

Professor Nick White

'From singular experiment to sustained policy: Liverpool City Council's Housing Programme, 1890-c. 1914', by Dr Bertie Dockerill, 18th June 2025

The Society's Editor, Dr Bertie Dockerill, gave a fascinating lecture which explored Liverpool City Council's innovative response to the shortage of housing in the decades before the First World War. The challenges of rapid population growth and overcrowding in poor quality accommodation were recognised in mid-century building and sanitary regulations, but not properly addressed. The world's first council-built estate for working-class people, St Martin's Cottages in Vauxhall, opened in 1869, but was not followed by sufficient private development. Prompted by a campaign in the Liverpool Courier, and negative comments in national legislation, the Council drew on Local Government Board funding to embark on an extensive and dynamic building programme. Building design improved from the 1880s to the 1910s, from the five-storey Nash Grove development to self-contained houses or low-rise blocks such as Gildarts Gardens, Vauxhall, with more attractive street layouts and some green space. The development on Great Homer Street, Everton, even included a football pitch and bandstand.

From the 1890s the Council strove to build new developments close to demolished housing and, significantly, prioritise those it had made homeless. There was a clear recognition in Liverpool that new properties must be suitable for court dwellers, but few were let at affordable rents, ensuring that it was largely wealthier working-class families residing in these new builds. Some of the poorest wards in the city saw an overall decrease in housing. Despite these limitations, however, Liverpool had progressed over four decades from being nationally shamed for its poor-quality housing to the development of an innovative building programme, not without its flaws, yet unrivalled outside London.

A recording of the lecture can be accessed via the Society's website.

Dr Fiona Pogson

Review: Bijan Omrani, God is an Englishman. Christianity and the Creation of England, Forum, 2025. £20

A book with this bold, sweeping title covering one and a half millennia and aimed at the general reader is obviously unlikely to be angled chiefly towards North-West England in its coverage. Its well-written, forcefully argued pages offer most on broad themes such as state formation, the development of kingship, law, language, national identity, citizenship, norms, values, culture, community and selfhood. This is a book about positive contributions and it tries very hard even in its conclusion not to be despondent. The Bible in English translation is viewed as having served as a matrix for so much else that is familiar in English systems and society, though less visibly so in the multi-ethnic country which exists today. The composition of hymns by Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley and others, it is argued here, compensated for the lack of home-grown operas. So much with which we are familiar today in our social services derived originally from religious inspiration. Generalisations aside, it is rich in anecdotes and choice nuggets of information. Anyone wishing to know about the origin of hot cross buns need stray no further than p. 145 of this volume. And its generalisations are pointedly illustrated at times with some telling examples drawn from Lancashire and Cheshire. Seventeenth-century puritan opposition to maypoles and other popular amusements is demonstrated by a case from Cheshire (p. 149). This contemporary description of hymn singing in Oldham in 1706 is surely one to cherish. 'Then out the people yawl an hundred parts. Some roar, some whine, some creak like wheels of carts' (p. 217). The survival of 'Purgatory Fields' in the heavily Roman Catholic Fylde area of Lancashire where families gathered round a flaming torch to pray for the souls of deceased family

members, we are told, persisted into the nineteenth century (p. 146). And where did Paul McCartney first encounter John Lennon? Where elsebut in St Peter's Church in Liverpool in 1957 where the latter was playing in a skiffle band! (p. 294).

Prof R.C. Richardson, University of Winchester

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