



SEAHORSE



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Newsletter of the Friends of the Midland Hotel, Morecambe

Hello to all members old and new. Firstly, my apologies for the delay in producing this edition of *Seahorse*. We have been working hard to update the Friends' website and this has proved more difficult and time-consuming than we envisaged. To have engaged a specialist website designer would have proved quite expensive, so remodelling the site has been undertaken by Ian (my husband) with help from books, a friend who kindly donated a software programme and phone calls to the professional we buy the web space from. We offered to pay for his advice but he declined – what a nice chap. By the time you receive this newsletter we should have a fully updated website (www.midlandhotel.org). Many thanks Ian. If you want to access the Members' Area of the website (where there are past issues of *Seahorse*, additional photographs and the latest news about the Midland) you will need to enter a new password. This can be found in the box on page 2.

Back in June (gosh! that does seem a long time ago) we held our second Members' Weekend in the hotel. It was lovely to see everybody who came – and the weather was much kinder than last year. On the Friday evening we were entertained with songs from the Thirties by vocalist Lynne Fox accompanied by Richard on piano. Committee member and Morecambe Tour Guide Peter Wade then led us on a gentle stroll along the promenade. On the following day Peter offered a choice of walks, giving members the opportunity to discover more about the local area. Saturday evening saw Boogie Bill Roberts playing piano in the foyer as we sipped pre-dinner cocktails before taking our seats for dinner in the Oliver Hill suite. Everyone enjoyed an excellent meal before setting out to watch the sunset over the bay from the end of the Stone Jetty. By this time the temperature had dropped somewhat so it was back to the hotel for a warming cup of coffee and the drawing of the raffle. Then it was on to the dance floor where Boogie Bill and his band, with Lauren on vocals, kept everyone entertained until midnight. Thanks to all who attended and made it such an enjoyable weekend.

On a sad note we were sorry to say goodbye to Matt Redhead who left the Midland at the end of September. Family circumstances meant that he had to return to Cornwall. As you know, Matt was the first General Manager of the refurbished Midland and had been responsible for guiding the hotel through its difficult early days and then taking it forward. Thanks to his efforts the Midland has improved markedly and it is now a very successful hotel. On a personal level, Matt had become a close friend to many of us over the two years he spent in Morecambe and we wish him and Ashley all the best for the future. Keep in touch Matt!

Sue Thompson



Boogie Bill and his band at the Friends' Weekend

MEMBERS' AREA PASSWORD

Please enter this password in lower case

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UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

In April, less than a year after its re-opening, the Midland Hotel changed hands. Although Urban Splash continues to own the building, English Lakes Hotels (ELH) has taken over the running of the hotel. Bryan Gray, on behalf of Urban Splash, said: 'This is a great deal for everyone. The Midland will benefit from English Lakes Hotels' experience'. Simon Berry, Chairman of ELH, said: 'The Midland fits perfectly with our other hotels and, for the first time, gives us a seaside location...and we're now looking forward to building on the success of this iconic hotel'.

English Lakes Hotels Ltd was established in its present form in 1979, developing from the initial purchase of the Low Wood Hotel on the shore of Windermere in December 1952 by Norman Buckley, great-uncle of the current Chairman. [Norman Buckley MBE was himself an interesting character, setting numerous World Water Speed records in his boats *Miss Windermere II, III, IV* and *V*, as well as being official time-keeper and good friend of Donald Campbell.] Further hotels were bought over the ensuing years: the Wild Boar at Crook in August 1959, the Royal at Bowness in October 1965 (later sold) and the Waterhead at Ambleside in July 1975.

Under the directorship of Michael Berry OBE (who took over on the death of his uncle Norman Buckley in November 1974) ELH continued to modernise and expand its portfolio, developing Low Wood as a Water Sports, Leisure and Conference Centre in the 1980s, and opening Lancaster House Hotel (adjacent to the University) in June 1991. Michael's sons Simon (now Managing Director/Chairman) and Tim (Building and Leisure Director) have ensured the ongoing family involvement in the company and continued its commitment to future development by the complete overhaul of the Waterhead Hotel and the acquisition of the running of Storrs Hall on Windermere in April 2003 – and now the Midland. ELH has been a very successful organisation, winning various awards for its hotels. We hope that its experience will benefit the Midland in the years ahead.

Some of the committee have met Simon Berry and feel that the Friends can look forward to having a fruitful relationship with ELH. He seemed keen to listen to our ideas, and the changes we have seen so far at the hotel are generally in line with our thinking, notably the introduction of comfortable seating in the foyer and new, more practical, furniture in the sun-lounge. Other changes are in the offing, including the possible refurbishment of the Rotunda to make it more user-friendly.

Members can discover more about English Lakes Hotels by logging on to www.elh.co.uk.

MEET THE NEW MANAGER

Matt Redhead has been succeeded by another Matt – Matt Stanaway – who was manager of ELH's Waterhead Hotel before taking over at the Midland. Matt 2, although having a degree in engineering, has worked in the hotel business for several years with stints in Nottinghamshire, Essex, Chester and Blackpool before joining ELH. At the moment he lives across the bay from the Midland at Grange-over-Sands with his wife and two children who, he says, keep him sane! Off duty, he enjoys a good curry washed down with a glass of red wine, and is a long-standing supporter of Manchester City. Describing the hotel as very different from others in his experience, Matt is looking forward to the challenge that the Midland represents. The Friends wish him every success.

Right: Matt Stanaway





The reproduction Marion Dorn rugs and comfortable new furniture give the hotel foyer a more welcoming ambience

WEST SIDE STORY: A GLASGOW JOURNEY

Glasgow city centre west of Buchanan Street is a Victorian creation based on a grid plan and populated with handsome pink or blonde sandstone commercial blocks of offices and shops. It is seeded with a handful of good quality buildings from the 1930s (including a bank by James Miller) pointing the way to the future construction of distinctive steel and glass structures in the late 20th century as the city reinvented itself. Travelling west by car from Glasgow city centre along the Great Western Road a motorist would first traverse the 19th century in architectural styles but, by the time suburban Anniesland is reached, would begin to see an increasing number of buildings typical of the 1930s. In these predominantly residential western suburbs are to be found several particularly fine examples of Thirties architecture.

First up is Kelvin Court, designed by J.N. Fatkin of Newcastle and described by McKean in 1987 as 'the largest private flat development in Scotland during the Thirties; over 100 flats in two enormous 11 storey blocks...it was a clever, popular development in an expanding industrial area with excellent communications by train, tram, bus and car to central Glasgow'. The aesthetic of brick and stone bands emphasising the horizontality of the blocks, punctuated by vertical stair towers, is more English than Glaswegian in style. Given that the road past Kelvin Court is constantly busy with traffic, it is fortunate for the residents that the apartments are set back some 50 metres behind a private access road and tidy lawns. Standing close up to these massive blocks is an awesome experience – size matters to an architect who wants to impress! The apartments are well tended and remain highly popular with buyers.

Across the Great Western Road from Kelvin Court is a former Odeon cinema, now recycled as an apartment block. To be frank, the only part of the building of Thirties origin is the street façade with its stairway drums and vertical fins, front entrance and finish. It's a bit of a facial cosmetic, probably at the planners' insistence, but still adds that bit of Thirties' flair and stylishness to an otherwise unremarkable block.

Turning off the Great Western Road onto Bearsden Road the motorist passes a 1970s tower block before coming to the now closed Canal Bar & Restaurant (so named because it was on the bank of the Forth and Clyde Canal). Originally John Laird's offices for Robertson Dunn sawmills, the brick building is now in a rather sad looking condition, unused and with broken windows. Describing industrial architecture of the Thirties, McKean considered this 'a delightful example...the front element of which, designed to impress passing motorists, is a combination of the most up to date motifs; portholes, a projecting semi-circular tower capped with a square pediment and a flagpole'.

Further along Bearsden Road, just before reaching Canniesburn, is a turning into a very modern housing development (circa 2005) by Cala and Miller Homes. It is actually the site of the former Canniesburn Hospital by James Miller, although it is not until the heart of the complex is reached that one will find Miller's wards, pavilions and office buildings. These have been given a full makeover and converted into apartments for the 21st century. In 1932 Miller was appointed assessor in the competition for the Infectious Diseases Hospital at Hawkshead. This was won by Thomas Tait (organiser of the 1938 Empire Exhibition) whose approach was to 'dematerialise' the wards so that when the elements permitted the patients could be out in the open air. Tait's views clearly influenced Miller in his design for Canniesburn Hospital (1934) which consists of a number of separate buildings – all long, low and brilliantly white and provided with balconies. The principal entrance is located at the centre under a square, stumpy tower of which Miller was not so fond. Canniesburn is another exercise in recycling a building that is no longer used for its original purpose, but here most of the external structure appears to have been retained thus keeping the proportions of these handsome buildings. However, despite the Thirties fashion for fresh air and sunshine, it is unlikely that the hospital balconies were often used. This part of Scotland can be both windy and very wet and the sheer labour of (wo)manhandling all those beds out and back again every time rain threatened would be a strong deterrent to bothering at all.

Some Thirties buildings in the western suburbs of Glasgow



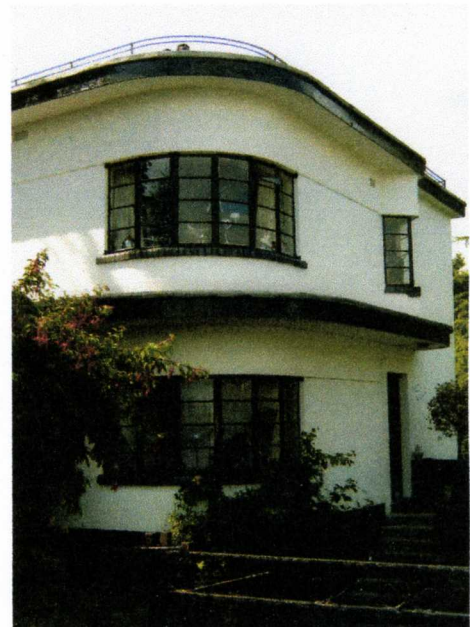
Kelvin Court – 'the largest private flat development in Scotland during the Thirties'



This former Odeon cinema has been recycled as an apartment block



Originally built as offices for Robertson Dunn sawmills, the Canal restaurant is no longer serving food



Curved windows of a Thirties 'Sunlight' house in Carse View



Canniesburn Hospital has been converted into apartments within a modern housing estate

Taking the road to Milngavie one travels through Thirties 'bungalowland' for a mile or so before turning into Carse View and straight into a time warp of some 75 years. On rising ground with views to the east and north is a small, select development of Thirties houses that ring all the stylistic bells. These are the 'Sunlight' houses by John R. Macdonald – and there are eight of them. Notice the flat roofs (I wonder whether they leak) with ship's rail, and a protruding roof doubling as a smart cornice echoed below in the extended porch, the finned window over the staircase, and the windows that turn an apparently unsupported corner. Not all the houses are to the same design, with a couple at the top of the rise more austere in appearance, altogether more boxy and with a different treatment of doors and windows. All are speculative developers' houses for the suburban retail market and not individually designed houses for a private client like much of Oliver Hill's work in this genre. Nevertheless, Hill would probably have appreciated their style, having been involved himself in planning a housing scheme at Frinton-on-Sea in Essex.

When these houses were built the residents would have looked out across the road and open ground towards a futuristic Thirties experimental project – the Bennie Railplane. This was a propeller-driven suspended carriage that ran on pylons over the existing railway line for one mile from Milngavie towards Hillfoots. It was, perhaps, a forerunner of present day monorails but was never adopted for mass production and remained a one-off.

Mike Stone

OLIVER HILL KNEW MY FATHER

My father Edward Duley joined Oliver Hill in 1919 when Hill, as he was always known in our family, was starting his architectural practice up again after the First World War. Dad was a 16-year-old straight from a central school in Marylebone where he had shown an aptitude for mathematics and drawing. With Hill he learned his trade, working on a great variety of jobs and attending night school at Regent Street Polytechnic. In 1928 he applied to become a probationer with the Royal Institute of British Architects when he was Hill's chief assistant, and then he stayed with him for twenty years until the outbreak of World War Two. At this time Hill virtually closed his practice and Dad left to do war work in Wales and Scotland, designing explosive factories.

After the war he assisted Hill in the design and building of Newbury Park Bus Station and it is with reference to this that Alan Powers, in his catalogue of the 1989 exhibition of Hill's work, refers to 'his faithful assistant Edward Duley'. Dad went on to join William Holford and Charles Holden on the City of London Plan and then became a partner with Holford in his new firm. He then became a licentiate of RIBA and later a fellow. His many works included a bridge over the River Severn at Tewkesbury and, later, one of the first open plan offices at Lloyds Register of Shipping. He became principal architect at Eton College where he carried out extensive renovations and built three new boys' houses; characteristic of these were detailed brickwork and curved and circular features reminiscent of Hill's style.

The contrast of his own education with the backgrounds of the privileged people he met never failed to amaze him all his life. This had started way back with Hill who was well connected and associated with a variety of well known and wealthy people. Architecture was my Dad's life and he was still a consultant with the firm when he died at 82 in 1985.

After reading Barry Guise's and Pam Brook's book on the Midland Hotel we joined the Friends and learned about the resurgence of interest in Oliver Hill. Since then we have tried to find out how much my father was involved in the building of the hotel and, with this in mind, visited the RIBA archive at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The surviving plans and documents gave no clues but the hotel is listed in Dad's biographical details at RIBA. On other plans, mostly for private houses, we recognized Dad's unmistakable handwriting and his style of lettering, quite an exciting discovery.

While reading the archive documents we were amazed at the almost daily letters which passed to and fro between Hill and Arthur Towle of the LMS Railway and Grimwade the quantity surveyor. This last name rang a bell with me immediately because, for as long as I could remember, Dad worked with Sidney Ainsley, who must have been the junior partner in the surveying firm of Grimwade and Ainsley. I had no idea that the connection went so far back. As I was born in 1938 I had little knowledge of Dad's work before the outbreak of war, which changed his life so much. However, he did speak of people such as Eric Gill and Marion Dorn; other clients' names in Alan Powers' book *Oliver Hill, Architect and Lover of Life* bring back memories of conversations long forgotten.

There is another strange connection with the Midland which I discovered when reading the book on the hotel. The piano in the Midland was apparently a Strohmenger semi-circular baby grand, designed by Oliver Hill. My father was an accomplished pianist and singer and at home in Ealing we had the same model in walnut on cradle legs which Dad bought from Strohmenger for £75, paying £30 down with instalments of 30 shillings a month. My main memory of it was the fun of sitting under it when Dad played. Unfortunately, our piano was sold and I do not know where it is now or the whereabouts of any others. If anybody knows of the existence of a Strohmenger piano, how wonderful it would be if we could reinstate it in the Midland.

