



SEAHORSE



Number 24

February 2011

Newsletter of the Friends of the Midland Hotel, Morecambe

Apologies for our extremely low profile over recent months and for the somewhat delayed appearance of this issue of Seahorse. This has been due partly to illness and partly to the fact that there has not been much of interest concerning the hotel to report to members. Since its management was taken over by English Lakes Hotels the Midland has settled down to become a well-run and efficient establishment. Key new staff have been appointed (including a new head chef) and the Midland is now benefiting from the expertise of a well-established hotel company. Room occupation has been good with the Christmas and New Year packages being particularly successful in attracting guests.

However, this could be the calm before the storm. As many of you are aware, Urban Splash still has a planning application pending for the development of the land adjacent to the hotel. This will be heard in the near future although the date of the meeting has not yet been finalised. At this stage we do not know if there have been any further changes to the original plans (for blocks of flats) which resulted in several hundred written objections to Lancaster City Council. As soon as we have more details we will send out a flyer to members. The Friends will ask for representation at the planning meeting.

I am sad to report that Mike Archer, Evelyn's husband, passed away in December. Evelyn is Chair of the Friends of the Winter Gardens and Mike has been at her side throughout their campaign to restore the theatre. He was one of the founding members of the Friends and worked tirelessly for the theatre, always giving of his time and knowledge freely. We will miss him. Our condolences go to Evelyn and her family.

On a happier note, as the Friends have enough money in the bank to cover newsletters, etc (and as we have been semi-dormant these last few months) it has been decided that members deserve a free year – so no subscriptions will be required for 2011.

Finally, the Annual General Meeting will be held on Friday 25th March at the Midland. We hope the weather will be a little kinder to us by then! Further details can be found on page 12.

If you want to email me for information on anything you will have to use my personal email at colliehouse@btinternet.com for the moment. We have had to change our service provider as it was causing us problems with the Friends' website.

I hope you all had a lovely Christmas and wish you all a happy 2011.

Sue Thompson

Marina plans hit snag

URBAN Splash has poured cold water on the idea of building a yacht marina near the Midland Hotel.

In a letter to Lancaster City Council, the hotel's owners warned that a marina would cost too much, would not be profitable and would interfere with their own plans to redevelop the central promenade area.

After receiving the letter and a 93-page feasibility study into a marina in Morecambe by engineering consultants Gifford, council cabinet members opted to delay talks on a marina until after Urban Splash's planning application to build on land next to the Midland has

been discussed early next year.

Patrick Sheridan, associate director of Urban Splash, wrote: "We have always liked the idea...but the marina would cost in the region of £20m to deliver which would have to be 100 per cent public funded. We also felt the use was not compatible with the environmental designations of Morecambe Bay."

Mr Sheridan said Urban Splash could still work with the council to deliver a marina, but having spent more than £1m on their plans to date they would expect compensation if they had to change their scheme to accommodate a marina on the site.

Midland owners to sell prime site in Cumbria

URBAN Splash is trying to sell off a prime piece of coastal land in Cumbria with spectacular views of the Lakes - dashing hopes for a leisure development on the site.

The owners of Morecambe's Midland Hotel want to offload a former slag bank in Millom just two years after buying it.

Copeland Borough Council had identified the site for a tourism attraction, possibly a holiday park.

The council hoped that Urban Splash would regenerate the area but now the land, which boasts fantastic views of the Duddon estuary, is up for sale and expected to fetch £450,000.

Assests

Chris Stalker, associate development director with Urban Splash, said: "We have a periodical review of our assets and decisions are then taken by our board.

"This has not always been on the cards. It is a business decision we have taken to explore the possibility of anyone interested."

Urban Splash recently wrote to Lancaster City Council to say they remained committed to the regeneration of Morecambe.

Lancaster City Council planning committee will soon meet to discuss their radical blueprint for the central promenade area.

The award-winning regeneration company

by Greg Lambert

wants to build a mixture of modern high-rise flats, cafes and shops, car parking space, a leisure development and gardens on land next to the Midland.

In 2008, Urban Splash opened the restored Midland Hotel but a year later they handed over the running of the property to English Lakes Hotels under a management contract.

Since then, the Manchester-based business has endured tough financial times, reporting a loss of £38.3m in 2008/9.

But the losses fell to £10.3m in 2009/10, when the developers also secured £150m of extra finance.

Urban Splash has recently been working on new property schemes in several cities including Bristol, Bradford, Plymouth and Sheffield.

These two news items concerning Urban Splash appeared in recent editions of *The Visitor* newspaper, the first on 15th December 2010, the second on 26th January 2011.

A LETTER FROM OLIVER HILL

At a meeting of the Hotels and Catering Committee of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway held on 16th December 1931 Arthur Towle, Controller of LMS Hotel Services, persuaded the committee to appoint "a young and promising architect" called Oliver Hill to be responsible for the design of the company's new hotel in Morecambe. Towle suggested to Hill that he should spend a few days in the resort looking at the site before finalising his plans. Hill visited Morecambe the following month and then wrote to Towle with his ideas for the Midland Hotel.

26th January, 1932

Midland Hotel – Morecambe

Dear Mr. Towle,

Acting upon your suggestion I visited Morecambe and spent several days there, considering the matter of the new Hotel.

I also saw the Borough Surveyor and studied the Council's scheme for the new promenade which is to pass in front of the L.M.S. property on the seaward side, and also the proposed Open air Baths, Grandstand etc., to be constructed on the site of the old docks and shipbreaking yard.

The new promenade is being laid out in a wide sweeping curve and it is evident that the line of the new hotel must conform to this same curve, which will bring the centre axis through the hotel facing West.

The sketch plans and the perspective drawing which I have prepared will explain my scheme. The predominant idea has been to plan the hotel with the long flank facing the sea, so that all the public rooms, the private sitting rooms, and as many bedroom suites as possible, have the sea view. The upper walls on the sea front are recessed, so that continuous sheltered balconies are provided to the bedroom suites.

I have schemed the Service quarters all at the North end and with staff rooms exclusively over the Kitchen, so that there may be no possibility of cooking smell in any of the Guest rooms. Also, at the North end and adjacent to the Service quarters, are the Café and Vaults, which will overlook the Council's new Bandstand and Open air swimming bath.

A long many windowed Dining Room is provided, so that every one has an equal view, and so that all the tables can be arranged against either the inner or outer wall, with a central gangway.

At the South end of the building is arranged an open Loggia, which is extended beyond the actual building as a screen to the garden. Between the hotel and the road is arranged a Hard Tennis Court, correctly orientated, around which is the Entrance Drive and car parking space.

The new hotel is so planned on the site that it can be proceeded with and completed without dislocating the use of the existing hotel. A temporary hoarding would be fixed to the scaffolding on the old hotel side, so that it would not be too unsightly.

The construction would be hollow brick walls, rendered externally, with steel and concrete floors and roof, and fireproof stairs. The treatment generally, both inside and out, would be simplified and without unnecessary detail, and will rely upon its lines, proportion and the massing of light and shade, for effect. The exterior would be rendered in the new "Snowcrete" cement, with slight colouring matter and silica added, to give the necessary colour, sparkle and freshness.

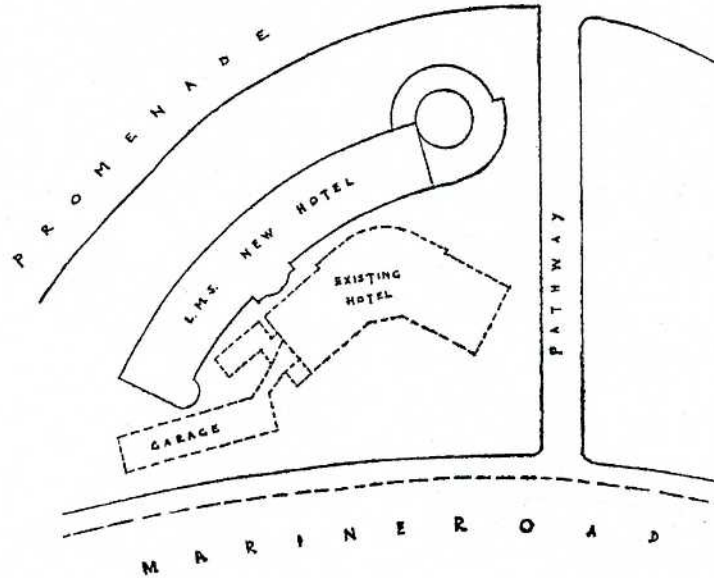
I have made it my business to keep in touch with the best Continental work of this kind, both in France, Germany, Austria and Scandinavia etc., and I feel that you have here an unique opportunity of building the first really modern hotel in this country. I may add that my enthusiasm was greatly stimulated by the situation itself.

I enclose herewith the report of the Surveyor, Mr. Clive Grimwade, F.S.I. giving the cost of my scheme which you will note will not exceed the authorized sum of £57,000 including all fees.

Thanking you for the opportunity you have afforded me.

Yours sincerely,

Oliver Hill



The new hotel was to be built behind the existing one which would continue in operation during construction work

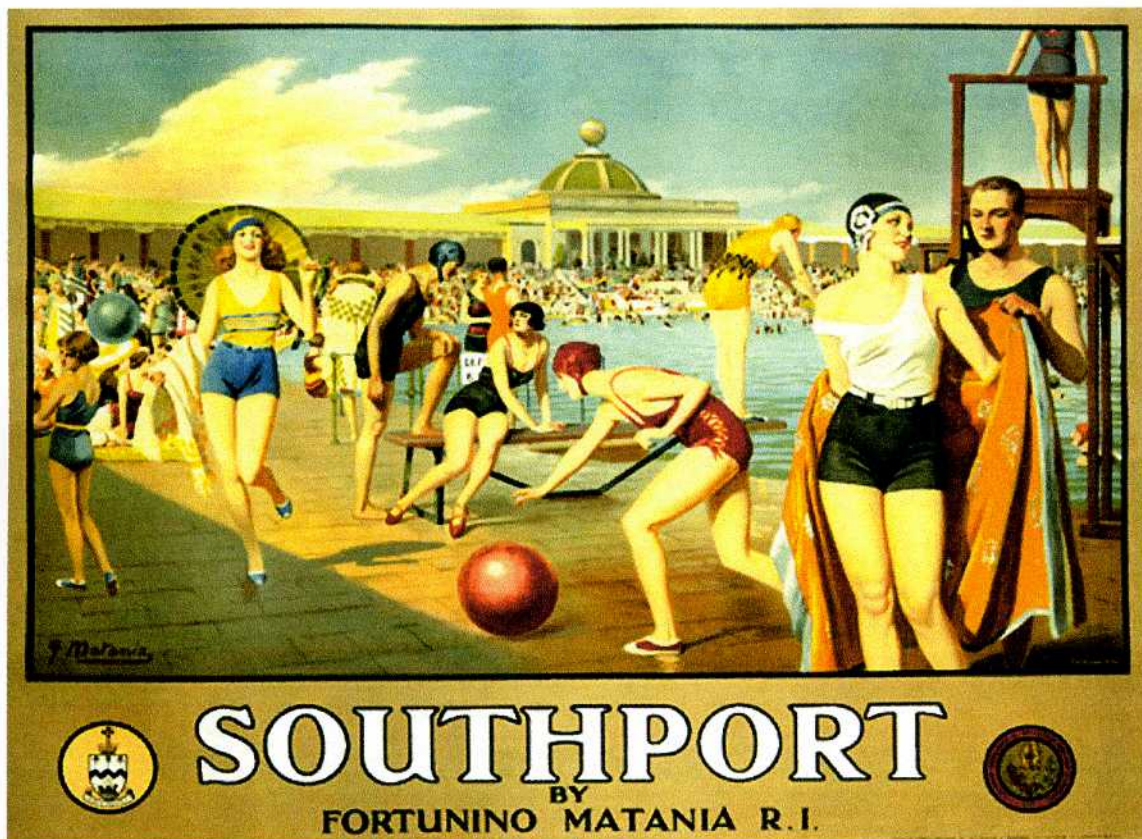


Sketch of proposed Midland Hotel by J.D.M. Harvey

LANCASHIRE'S DOLCE VITA

The lidos of the 1930s brought some Italian glamour and sunshine to Britain's seaside resorts, including Morecambe. Lido life on the Lancashire coast was also illustrated by an Italian, Fortunino Matania who produced some of the more distinctive posters of the time aimed at attracting rail passengers to Southport by day or night and to Blackpool.

Matania's daytime view *Southport* is set inside the Sea Bathing Lake or lido of 1928 (in her book *Liquid Assets*, Janet Smith notes that the remark in the local newspaper, *The Southport Visiter*, that 'One was reminded forcibly of the Lido' was one of the earliest likening British open air pools to lidos). Centrally, Matania pictures the domed café where an orchestra played light classics and popular songs. A colonnade below is flanked on either side by the changing rooms which form a line running across the whole of the background beneath an almost cloudless sky. Plenty of spectators are to be seen in the distance but few heads bob in the water (it was common then for only a fraction of those entering lidos to actually bathe). In the foreground we see some of Southport's bright young things: a woman running towards us with her head framed by a parasol, another woman bouncing a red beach ball centrally, as if playing with the sun itself, and, to the right, a woman, one shoulder revealed, being helped into (or is it out of?) a cape by her male companion. All are colourfully clothed in either shorts and sleeveless tops or one-piece bathing costumes. Bathing caps abound.

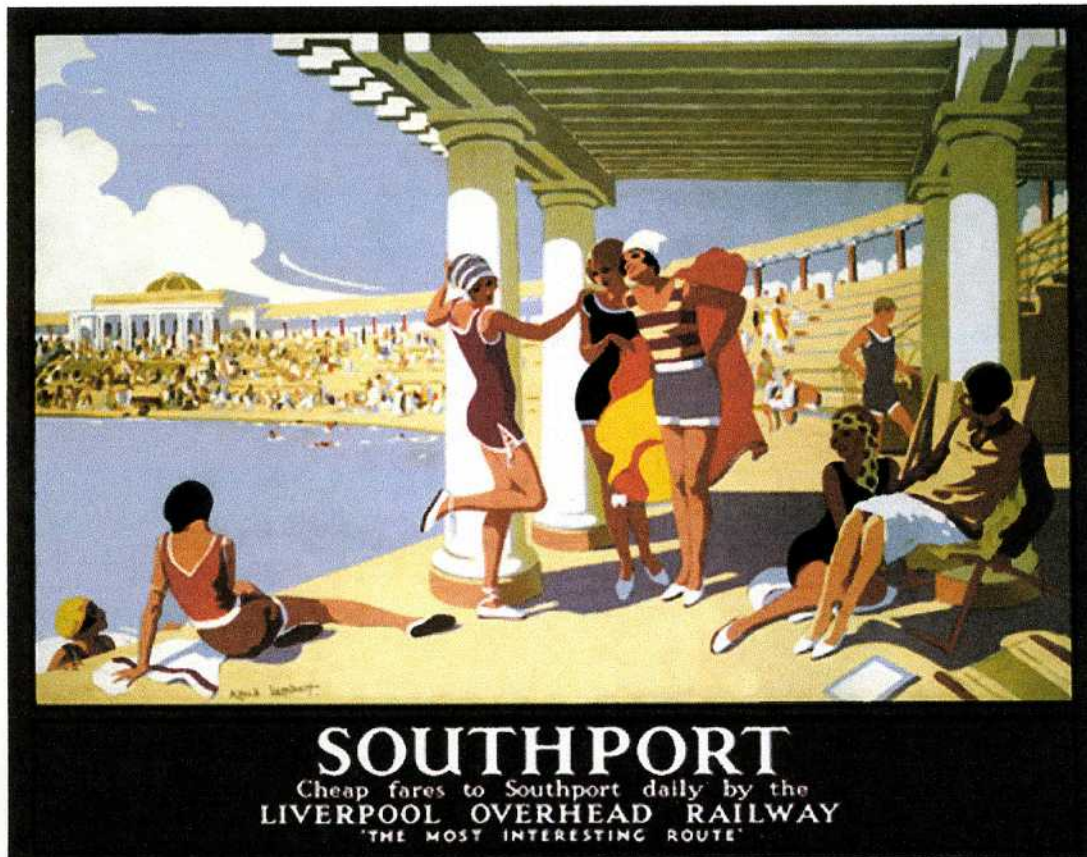


Fortunino Matania's 1928 poster of Southport lido

Southport's lido was closely modelled on Blackpool's of 1923. Each had an amphitheatre and central pool, a domed entrance/café, open pergolas and colonnades. Descriptions spoke of 'the magnificent temple that Southport has built to the goddess of air and water and sunshine. Here the youth and beauty of the town disport themselves in the most elegant surroundings and men and maidens meet in the pleasant cafes surrounding the pool to talk about the concert that is over, or the dance that is to come.'

More recently, Roger Deakin wrote of lidos in general that they 'are to swimming pools as lingerie is to underwear. Their outrageous fountains and curvaceous terraces celebrate the exuberant beauty of the water they frame, so that a special sense of freedom comes over you when you stand poised to plunge in. Lidos have always been designed with a strong sense of theatre ... You go to a lido to bathe and to be seen to bathe.'

Matania's moment by the pool is complemented by Alfred Lambart's poster *Southport* which again shows the lido, this time from a shaded spot beneath a pergola.



Alfred Lambart's poster of Southport lido

By contrast, Matania's other Southport poster, *Southport for a holiday in wintertime*, is a night view and a wet one at that. The setting is under the canopy of the 1932 Garrick Theatre as the crowd leaves at the end of the evening's performance. The wall of the entrance is marked by a bold Art Deco motif while, below, the elegantly dressed audience spills out into the night. Darkly clad male figures contrast with the colour of the ladies' close-fitting gowns, short-waisted jackets and furs, all reflected in the wet pavement. A chauffeur stands patiently by a waiting car, mackintosh and umbrella at the ready, while more cars and crowds are to be seen beyond, among the lights of Lord Street. Matania's original painting for this poster dating from about 1935 can be seen in the Atkinson Art Gallery, Southport.

Matania's third Lancashire poster is *Blackpool*, set somewhere on the south shore. In the background, the Tower is prominent, as are the domed pavilion on the Central Pier and the promenade gardens. The principal feature though is the crowds, again colourful and relaxed. In the foreground to the right are three women in bathing costumes and short capes. One stands, her right arm raised, echoing the vertical of the Tower behind, while another holds a red and blue beach ball. With them is a man in an open-necked white shirt, grey slacks and two-tone shoes. Beyond is the crowd on the promenade: more open-necked shirts, a woman in a green dress with matching hat and handbag and a young woman in navy slacks and a checked shirt. To the left we see down to the beach and more figures in bathing costumes.

These are though surely figures from a warmer southern climate or a more modern time. The reality we see from postcards and photographs of the Lancashire seaside at the time is of more layers and more formality in an altogether more buttoned-up age (see page 9).

Matania's posters display his name prominently, printed below the name of the destination, a practice reserved for 'star' illustrators such as Norman Wilkinson or S. J. Lamorna Birch. So who was Fortunino Matania?

Matania was born in Naples in 1881. His father, Eduardo was an artist and the young Fortunino helped him produce book and magazine illustrations. From the age of 14, Fortunino was producing illustrations in his own right for *L'illustrazione Italiana*. After a short spell in Paris, he was in London in 1902 to produce illustrations of the coronation of Edward VII. This began a long connection with events surrounding the British Royal Family running right through to the coronation of the present Queen in 1953.

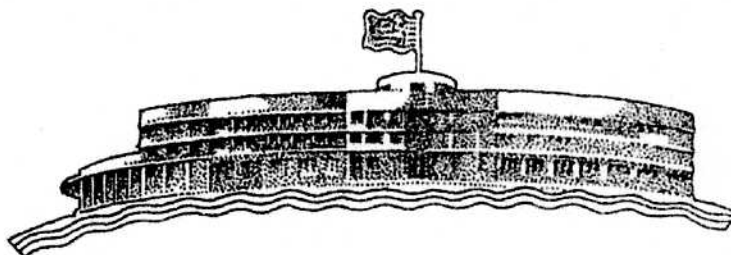
From 1904, Matania produced illustrations for *The Sphere* including one of his most famous which was an imaginary view of the sinking of the Titanic. During the First World War he was a war artist, producing rather colourful battle scenes and the kind of sentiment much in vogue at the time such as *Goodbye, Old Man* depicting a soldier's farewell to his dying horse.

Following the war, Matania became well known for his views of high society in the classical world for the women's magazine *Britannia and Eve*. These were subjects such as Samson and Delilah, often including nudes, which would have been produced at the same time as his Lancashire posters.

Fortunino Matania exhibited regularly at the Royal Academy and Royal Institution (the letters RI often followed his name), contributed to magazines in both Britain and the USA including *The Illustrated London News* and worked on advertisements for clients ranging from Ovaltine to Burberry. His drawings of ancient Rome and Egypt formed the basis of the settings for Cecil B. de Mille's film *The Ten Commandments*. Fortunino Matania died in 1963.

Peter Wade

WADE'S WALKS 2011



This year's programme of guided walks in and around Morecambe features the usual mix of established favourites and new departures. Apart from this year's evening walks, the walks begin at 2pm. All the walks are priced at £2.50 per person.

Echoes of Art Deco

April 22; May 28; July 30; September 24

Meet: The Platform, opposite the Midland Hotel

Puttin' on the Ritz (a new Art Deco walk for 2011)

April 23; June 25; August 27; October 29

Meet: Broadway Hotel, Marine Road East, Morecambe

Sunderland Point and Sambo's Grave

June 11 & October 8

Meet: Information Board, Causeway End, Sunderland Point

Eric's Morecambe

July 2

Meet: Eric Morecambe statue, Central Promenade, Morecambe

Crook o' Lune and the Perfect Landscape

July 9

Meet: Old Railway Station, Denny Beck Lane, Halton-on-Lune

Lancaster's Victorian Men of Science

July 16

Meet: Queen Victoria' statue, Dalton Square, Lancaster

A Date with Dame Thora

July 23

Meet: Post Office, Victoria Street, Morecambe

Hidden Heysham

August 13

Meet: Bus turnaround, Main Street, Heysham Village

Hest Bank – Mawson's Garden Village

August 20 & September 17

Meet: Level Crossing, Hest Bank

Sons of the Sands

September 3

Meet: Corner Lord Street and Morecambe Promenade (opposite Gala Bingo)

Poulton-le-Sands and Old Morecambe

October 1

Meet: Police Station, Poulton Square, Morecambe

In Search of Turner's View

October 15

Meet: Bus turnaround, Main Street, Heysham Village

Lancaster's Lost Observatory

October 22

Meet: Ashton Memorial entrance, Williamson Park, Lancaster

A season of Tuesday evening walks beginning at 7.30pm will also be held. The starting points are as above.

A Date with Dame Thora, June 7

Sons of the Sands, June 14

Hest Bank – Mawson's Garden Village, June 21 & July 26

Hidden Heysham, June 28

Poulton-le-Sands and Old Morecambe, July 5

In search of Turner's View, July 12

Sunderland point and Sambo's Grave, July 19

Watch out too for free tours of Morecambe's 1932 Town Hall on September 10 & 11 as part of this year's Heritage Open Days.

For further details of the above walks or to arrange walks/talks at other times, please contact Peter Wade on (01524) 420905.

BATHING FASHIONS AT MORECAMBE



Super Swimming Stadium 1936



Different styles on the same day outside the Midland Hotel 1935



Paddling in 1932

THE MAYBURY ROADHOUSE : A SCOTTISH ART DECO SURVIVOR

The Maybury Roadhouse is a building very much of its time both in style and function. Constructed in 1935 and described by its Edinburgh based architects Patterson & Broom as a 'new form of inn', it was a mongrel cross between a public house, a restaurant and a function suite. It is situated on the western side of Edinburgh on what used to be known as the Edinburgh Turnpike. Its location in the outer suburbs and at the junction of several major north-south and east-west highways reflects the rationale for such a roadhouse, associated as it is with the growth of car ownership and motoring in the 1930s.

Plans of the Maybury Roadhouse are available on the internet but are not the architects' originals being dated 1944 and authored by the firm of P. Dick, Peddie & McKay. This suggests that some alterations were planned at this time. They show the major ground floor spaces designated as Dining or Tea Room, Lounge Bar, Lounge and various service rooms and stores. The dining room is double height except for a balcony that runs around on the upper floor. It is a splendid space but it is unclear whether it was used for that purpose in the years before 1944. McKean, writing in 1987, describes it as a ballroom with balcony dining area. One present member of staff remembers it being used as a ballroom with a staircase at one end that was later removed 'because it was not original'. Today this elegant space is crowded with gaming tables as, for over a decade, the Maybury has been a casino. Casinos, one feels, should always be housed in a stylish building and the Maybury certainly has style – albeit with discrepancies between inside and out. Externally its plainness, purity and lack of ostentation are in one mode but internally all is different with lavish, somewhat over-the-top Art Deco features and decoration.



The Maybury Roadhouse

The entrance tower, said to resemble the radiator of a car of the time, is a rectangular block constructed of mass concrete with a flat roof. A semi-circular glazed bay flanked by plain windows projects forward on a cantilevered balcony edged with ship's railings. Flagpoles emphasise the entrance. Apparently the original plans provided for games on the flat roof, an activity implicit in the idea of the roadhouse which was 'to improve on the image of public houses, and to supply meals and games, such as skittles, and other entertainment, in addition to the drink to patrons'. Car owners in the Thirties were likely to be middle class, aspirational and upwardly mobile and they wanted more than a spit and sawdust tavern.

Along the side the rectangular domestic windows (linked by layer-cake brick banding) give the impression that they open onto bedrooms but there is, in fact, no residential accommodation. Form does not follow function and on entering the building the visitor is shocked to discover the nature of the spaces concealed behind these windows.

Beyond the reception area the double height entrance hall leads on to an impressive sweeping staircase with cascade rails. The landing is dominated by a large Art Deco sculpture known as *The Flame Leaper* described by the proprietors as being designed by Johan Philippe Ferdinand Preiss and characteristically lithe, athletic and elegant in its movement. The description is apt except for the fact that the figure is a copy, reported in the Edinburgh Evening News in 1985 as being made of fiberglass by the Leith artists Alan Herriot and Jan Ochman and installed in the Maybury that year. 1985 was an important year for the Maybury, which had been on McKean's register of Thirties buildings at risk because of its dilapidated condition, when the brewers Scottish & Newcastle invested £1.5 million on its complete refurbishment.



Main staircase with cascade rails



The Flame Leaper

The ground floor spaces feel cluttered with gaming tables and one-arm bandits but they do not conceal the elegant lines and proportions of the one time ballroom. Upstairs the dining room balcony merges into what is now a spacious lounge area behind the well-lit glazed bay above the main entrance. At this end the metal balcony rails become a solid parapet capped by a sinuously curved and notched handrail directing the eye to a glamorous feature bar.

The horizontal lines of the shining metal and glass counter are faced by three wooden panels separated by vertical strips of alternate metal and wood. The outer two panels are decorated with wedge shaped sunray motifs and the centre one with an octagonal medallion. Flashy it certainly is but sufficiently restrained as to suggest sophistication rather than vulgarity. Downstairs the ballroom opens onto a small patio with steps down to what is now a car park but may once have been a garden area. From here the Maybury resembles the stern of an immaculate cruise ship, all flags flying as it makes stylish progress at fifteen knots towards the port of Leith!

Mike Stone

The
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
of the
Friends of the Midland Hotel

will take place on

Friday 25th March 2011 at 7.15pm

at

The Midland Hotel, Morecambe

Agenda

- 7.15 A short introductory talk by Matt Stanaway, manager of the Midland Hotel. Matt will outline the changes that have taken place at the hotel over the last year and ELH's plans for the future.
- 7.30 Friends' AGM :
 Chairperson's Report
 Secretary's Report
 Treasurer's Report
 Election of Officers
 Any Other Business
- 8.10 Refreshments.
- 8.30 Slide Show.
 Evelyn Archer, Chair of the Friends of the Winter Gardens, will give a slide presentation on 'The History of Morecambe', including the Midland Hotel, Winter Gardens, etc.
- 9.15 Close. Hotel bar will be open for drinks until 11.00 pm.

If you intend coming to the AGM it would be helpful if you could let Sue Thompson know by Wednesday 23rd March so that numbers of light refreshments can be finalised. You can contact Sue by telephone on (01524) 851351

or email at colliehouse@btinternet.com

or by post to 12, Longlands Avenue, Heysham, Lancs LA3 2NU.

Minutes of the AGM will be sent to members in the next newsletter.

Articles for future newsletters are always welcome. They could be about the Midland Hotel, Morecambe, Art Deco, The Thirties, or related topics. Please send to...

Barry Guise, 23, Broadlands Drive, Bolton-le-Sands, Carnforth, Lancs LA5 8BH.