

Report on the Third ICLS Congress University of Liverpool, August 11-16, 1980

Although 'The Cavern' was not exactly the Court of Champagne, the Beatles gave Liverpool a fame for popular song (which was also apt for more intimate listening, like the medieval lyrics) which the troubadours might well have envied. The Triennial Congress of the ICLS fell one year before the University of Liverpool celebrated the centenary of its formation as University College, originally part of the University of Manchester. In the event, the meeting of the *cortois* of several continents with the *vilains* of Merseyside proved an extremely happy one and when the working day was over there seemed common agreement on the definition of *aventure*--find the nearest pub! The 'Philharmonic Arms' opposite (and in practice part of) the home of the splendid Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra (affectionately known from its location as the Band of Hope Street) is, indeed, celebrated for its conviviality and, even more, for the historic interest of its unaltered period fittings (the porcelain of the 'Gents' has, in fact, been featured on British Television). The generous provision of smoking rooms, 'snugs' and the like proved ideally suited as lists for the medievalists' lunchtime tournaments and medieval dialectology could only benefit from the excellent opportunity to hear Liverpool speech, namely 'Scouse', in action (*Yer'l get plenny o'bevvy ere*: 'This place is licensed for the sale of intoxicating drinks'; *I'm werkin fer de queen*: 'I am drawing unemployment benefit'; *Durs more life in me bruvver, and ee's on an ergent note*: 'This person is somewhat lacking in liveliness'). In fact, from Sevvv Park Liblab (Sefton Park Public Library) to De Black Ouse (The Royal Liver Building, now cleaned) congressists enjoyed an unmatched introduction to 'De Pool' from the Liverpudlians themselves. In what other city could one stand in a single street and, looking left, view the Anglican Cathedral of Sir Giles Scott, and to the right the striking lantern (irreverently named the Mersey Funnel) of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, begun in 1962 and consecrated in 1967? And all around, the exotic restaurants of Hardman Street and Leece Street where one could indulge in anything from a kebab to a plate of scouse (outrageously billed in one restaurant as *pot-au-feu l'hiver poule*).

A notable feature of the Congress was the comfortable accommodation afforded by Dale Hall on the university's Carnatic site, a beautifully landscaped complex of residences designed in the early 1960s and offering a refreshing alternative to the industrial side of the city, a Belrepeire on the edge of the Waste Land. At the opening reception here the City was represented by its ebullient Lord Mayor, the University by its Pro-vice-chancellor (an engineer who made a valiant attempt to empathise with our somewhat different discipline) and medieval studies by the University's Public Orator, the anglicist R. T. Davies, who gave a memorably witty speech of welcome. After the success of this reception, at which so many already familiar faces recognised each other, spirits remained high for the duration of the Congress.

The academic diversity of the sessions can easily be gauged by a glance at the programme, though I shall never understand why the males were referred to as *Chairman* and the females as *Chairperson* -- perhaps *Chairpersona* would be the most comprehensive solution. In fact, (s)he is not a very standardised figure. Some kept the speakers they introduced to a rigorous observation of their time allowance, with commendable equity, whilst others allowed speakers endless self-indulgent rambling. I particularly admired, and commend as a model, the Liverpool

professor who discreetly placed an alarm clock before him and consequently had no trouble with his speakers.

In addition to the near-perfect day-to-day running of the Congress by the Liverpool organisers, whose commitment to the success of the Congress left one full of admiration, mention must be made of the inviting excursions which were available. On the third day of the Congress there was a delightful visit to Chester (Cestre in Domesday Book), site of a roman legionary fortress, Deva, and now famous for its cathedral, race-course and charming half-timbered shopping arcades known as the 'rows'. Not only did congressists enjoy the assistance of friendly and expert guides, but they further appreciated a visit to the City Archives, a reception in the Town Hall given by the Deputy Mayor, and, in the evening, a superbly arranged medieval banquet in the thirteenth-century Cathedral Refectory, which was a model of tasteful imitation of the past. Further treats were in store. Eight miles from Liverpool (which had been created a borough by King John in 1207 as a more easily controllable base for expeditions to Ireland than Chester) the gorgeous Tudor half-timbered manor house known as Speke Hall (built 1490-1612) was the scene of another visit, as was Rufford Old Hall, just north of Ormskirk, which offered an unparalleled picture of a Tudor great hall in the form which was characteristic of Lancashire and Cheshire. Other excursions also took place, notably to Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire.

All in all, an exceptionally harmonious and efficiently organised Congress which left the participants sorrier to leave Liverpool than they might have anticipated.

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(Editor's note. Tony Hunt's reminiscences must be supplemented by reference to other inimitable sights: Philippe Ménard eating an ice lolly; a band of *Germanisten* going for a walk at 4.a.m.: Ray Cormier, seeing a carving of the aft end of a horse in Chester Cathedral, and shouting: "I've found Yvain!")