



# THE



# LIVER

# BIRDS



a booklet in adobe pdf format published by

**Gerry Jones**

LIVERPOOL MUSICIAN



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**Edition 2011**

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# THE LIVER BIRDS

## Introduction

On the pages that follow are Articles on the "Third Liver Bird Project" and the "Centenary of the Liver Birds" along with Liver Bird facts and history. Wherever possible I have included web links to other sites that have interested me during my research on all that is "The Liver Birds".

Please feel free to contact me if you wish to comment on these pages or you if you have anything that you feel is relevant and that could, at my discretion, be included in this booklet.

I, of course, will be adding any further information, as and when, especially as this is the centennial year of our well-beloved Birds. You will find recent news at the end of this booklet.

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## A Third Liver Bird for Liverpool

### What is the "Third Lyver Bird Project?"

To have a Liver Building Bird constructed, at ground level, standing on a Liver Clock Dial, which would fulfil the following functions:-

- a Tourist Attraction, at which every tourist will have themselves photographed.
- as Public Art, a unique subject – everyone likes it!
- for Capital City of Culture, a major item celebrating our status.
- for Public Pride, a sign of our present confidence.
- as A Memorial for 2007, marking and celebrating our city's 800th Centenary.
- and we would at last be making the most of this unique resource, the true icon of Liverpool.

### How did it all start?

This project started in March 2000, with this letter of mine to the "Liverpool Echo," copied to David Henshaw, the relatively new Chief Executive of the city.

*"Dear Sir,*

*While there are plans afoot to position the Yellow Submarine, the Blue Peter Ship and the other thing, has nobody thought of the ultimate Liverpool work of art? Something we would all love to see first hand, a third LYVER BIRD!*

*Yes, another copy of the real thing, life size, and at ground level, where we could really appreciate the size and scale of the originals.*



*This would be one subject that absolutely everyone in Merseyside could agree on*

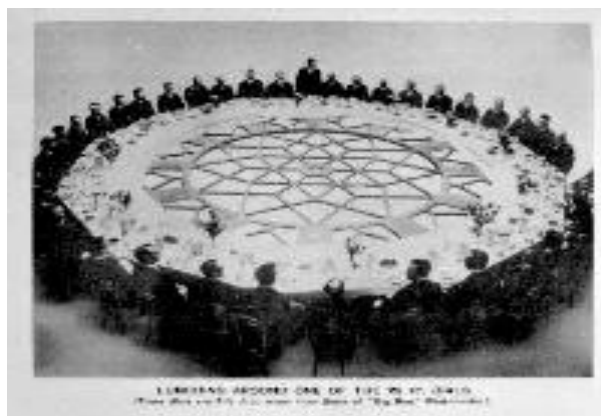
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*as being worthy of a prime location. And what a tourist draw it would be. Surely it would attract so much sponsorship that no civic funding would not be needed.*

*To gild the lily, it could be set on a low round base, similar to the "oil-rig" platform in Church St, except that this one could be a life-wise replica of the face of a Liver Clock - the one all the councillors (directors) sat round before it was erected.*

*Come on, folks, let's think BIG!"*

*Gerry Jones.*



To explain things in much more detail, here is a draft we made in early discussions, of a speech that might later be called for, to those who can make a final decision. It is given here as a handy way of introducing this project and the thinking behind it, though the benefits can be summarised briefly as follows:-

Benefits would be:

- Tourism; another attraction, a focus, meeting place, and symbol.
- Public Art; a unique subject; another gap filled.
- City of Culture; a major item supporting our Bid.
- Civic Pride; a sign of our present confidence.
- A Memorial; an ideal marker and celebration of the 800th Centenary

And we would at last be making the most of this unique resource.

## **Focus on the Lyver Bird**

"Many great cities have a symbol that identifies them throughout the world; Sydney has its Opera House, Brussels has its Manneken Pis, Paris the Eiffel Tower, Venice its gondolas, Copenhagen the Little Mermaid. London has Tower Bridge. Many others wish they could have

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such an image; what is the symbol of Birmingham? of Manchester? of Leeds?, Glasgow?, Tokyo?, Glasgow?, or Cardiff?

"LIVERPOOL has the Liver Birds; we see images of them everywhere, on council vans and waste-bins, on letterheads and bollards. There are three in our City coat of arms, and three in the University crest. LFC has one in its badge, JMU has a very modern version; Harrison Lines have a white one on Mersey Chambers overlooking St Nicholas Church, Liver Launderettes and Liverpool RSCDS make use of it. BUT, having said that, THESE ARE ONLY COPIES AND



VARIANTS OF THE GENUINE ARTICLES, which very few of us can see from less than three hundred feet away, high up on their domes on the Liver Building. Even if you tour the Building, all you can see is the back of the East Bird, some 60 feet away.

This raises three linked questions. If Cities were people, then most of them would KILL to have such an icon, such a symbol. But what do we do in Liverpool ? We settle for copies, for images, for pictures, for versions, for fakes. WE UNDER-USE THIS MIGHTY RESOURCE. HOW can we make the REAL THING AVAILABLE?

## **Resume of how the project started**

"A few months ago, the City asked people to suggest permanent locations for the Yellow Submarine, the Blue Peter Ship, and the Superlamb Banana. This led to thoughts about the small number of major public works of art in the city centre; how many can any one of us name produced in the 20th century? The Moores Brothers striding down Church St., John Lennon in Clayton Square corridor, Eleanor Rigby, Dooley's Donkey, Johnny Walker and the Merchant Navy memorial. Not a lot, is it? There are plans for a monument to the era of

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horse-drawn transport. What else? We do want to be City of Culture don't we? And still the Liver Birds watch over us, unapproachable and distant. HOW can we increase the amount of public art in our City? (the second question).

## A Bit of History

"Nearly 800 years ago, our City received its Charter; on 2007 we will be celebrating our "800th", looking back over our history and growth. The original Seal was the Eagle of St. John, which was at one stage lost, and replaced by one in which the eagle looked much more like a Cormorant with seaweed, or "laver" in its beak. This was transformed by myth and legend into the Liver Bird. We must also look FORWARD, as our city is buzzing with regeneration, Albert Dock, Objective One improvements, Liverpool Vision, Haymarket, Queen Square, new hotels, Rope-walks Project, Bluecoat Triangle, and ever increasing tide of (very welcome) tourists, students and day-trippers.



So, (third question) HOW CAN WE IMPROVE OUR PRODUCT?

## Rationale of the project: aims and objectives

"To summarise these three questions; We are short of public works of art, yet aiming to be City Of Culture. We want to celebrate our 800 years of history, and to symbolise our lively present day, with its growing inward investment and tourism. And still we are under-using one of the best images in the world; the Liver Birds." THESE PROBLEMS CAN ALL BE SOLVED, BY ONE EXCITING PROJECT."

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## Outline of Project

"Let us bring the Liver Birds to the people, by constructing a THIRD LYVER BIRD, a full-size replica, the real thing, at ground level, in the centre of our city.

"Let it be seen, by all the shoppers, all the students, all the theatre-goers, all the "clubbers", all the tourists. Let them see it in detail, walk under it and be awed by the sheer magnitude and scale of it, take photos of each other under its wings, and send these images of our city to every country under the sun.

Let them enjoy another true work of art, and appreciate it as such.



"And let us make proper use of our unique symbol as a unifying source of civic pride for all our disparate peoples, of whatever country, occupation, religious or sporting affiliation, and celebrate our long past and our burgeoning present, and make a statement that we as a city have now regained the self-assured confidence of our Victorian forebears, who thought BIG and built BIG and built to LAST.

Let us use it to show that we are worthy to be City of Culture."

## Technical Notes

"Each Bird itself stands 18 feet high - it would take three tall acrobats standing on each others shoulders to reach its beak - and its wingspan is nearly 25 feet. There is a large "rod of iron" going right through it from inside the dome it stands on. It is clad in sheets of weathered copper, using techniques which owe as much to shipbuilding as to fine art. It is braced against a century of Atlantic gales by strong hawsers from wing to floor, with other bracing struts behind its neck, to secure its outspread wings.

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## Location

"Next, we need criteria for a suitable location;

It must be located in the city centre, as the Bird is to be a celebratory focus for the Whole City,. The site must be big enough for a 25-foot circle, accessible (e.g. NOT on a traffic island), and available (no plans to build on it). There should also be some way of viewing the bird from above as well as at ground level; a spot with steps or stairs nearby would serve. Ideally, it should also be possible to see The Real Liver Birds from the site."



The best site we have found so far, which meets all these criteria perfectly, is Roe Street/Queen Square, on the pavement area between the Queen Square Tourist Office, St John's Precinct, and the Royal Court. Just round the corner from Lime Street Station, the Bird could face and greet all the shoppers and workers pouring off the buses, all the theatre-goers attending the Royal Court or the Playhouse, and all the tourists using the Tourist Office.

"Every statue has its plinth, and the Bird has got to stand on something. This gives us an ideal opportunity to celebrate another local landmark - the Liver Clock, which is coming up for its own centenary in 2011. It is 25-feet in diameter, - 2'6" wider than Big Ben - and that makes it the ideal size to act as a plinth for a bird with 25-foot wingspan. Again, it has to be life-size to give viewers the full impact of the scale; before it was installed, forty people sat round it for a dinner. But since it is just to serve as a plinth, it need not be made of a ton of

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opal glass - any durable paving material in black and white would serve, as it is to be set flush in the pavement for total access. A "scale model" of this idea already exists, in marble, in the Café and Fountain area of the Liver Building.

The project would offer best value when enhanced by such items as a 'Welcome to Liverpool' sign-board, round which visitors could cluster for photographs and make sure our city is named in each photograph, an information table or "Museum Box," giving historical notes, and samples of how the Bird is used by other local enterprises.



"Tactile pavement" technology, so that the clock face size and pattern may be discerned. People with special needs would be able to touch and feel parts of the bird, and so gain a feeling for the size and scale of the whole item. Floodlighting, through some of the "glass panels" Relaying the Chimes of the Liver clock.

## Finance

"When we consider the financing of this project, there is much good news. The original birds and clock exist, so there will be no design costs; hopefully the original plans and drawings will be available.

A site which is entirely on city-owned land will save a large sum. Expertise exists within the city offices to provide fairly accurate costs for materials and construction, but our soundings indicate that a figure

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somewhere between £100,000 and £200,000 would be expected.

The use of durable materials - intended to last at least a century - should mean very little in maintenance costs. Dolomite marble to use for the plinth would cost under £4,000, and would last forever. As it is flush with the pavement, it would be no more costly to maintain the plinth as it would to maintain the paving it would be replacing.

"The first Source of finance to be considered must be The National Lottery, especially its Heritage funds; if this project is not HERITAGE writ large, then what is? The City has the expertise and experience to put in a competent and realistic Bid for at least half the cost.

European Money should be available in one form or another. Again, city staff know how to claim.

Sponsorship from local businesses should be forthcoming, especially from companies at or near the site; this should prove even more attractive to companies if they were then allowed to be mentioned in one of the white panels of the Clock Dial, in neat gold lettering, at their own expense.



The City surely has a budget in mind to fund items connected with the Celebration of the 800th, and this would be a valid claim on such resources.

Our Twinned Cities, and other people and places with connections and links with the City may well wish to be involved in this scheme - and involvement costs you!

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Public Subscription could be invited, more as a means of allowing participation than as a major source of income.

In short; there are many possible sources of income, so that the City should be able to afford and support this scheme without having to sacrifice jobs or services."

## The Time Scale

"As regards a time-scale, we are looking forward from 2000 now, to the city's "800th" in 2007, and the Birds' Centenary in 2010. This would give us a few years to explore, plan, estimate, design, cost, raise finance, jump through hoops, do tendering, obtain materials, and actually construct the items, so it would seem logical to link this project to the "Octocentenary" plans. It could play a major part in the celebrations; we might even be able to stage a re-run of the Dinner Round the Dial that took place before installation.

## The Final Pitch - The Benefits

"Then it would really deliver its benefits;

- Tourism; we would have another attraction, a focus, meeting place, and symbol.
- Public Art; a unique subject; another gap filled.
- City of Culture; a major item supporting our Bid.
- Civic Pride; a sign of our present confidence.
- a memorial; an ideal marker and celebration of our 800th Centenary.
- 

And we would at last be making the most of our unique resource.

"If the City, through its elected representatives, will take this project to heart, then all the remaining questions can and will be answered, and problems surmounted.

And when the time comes to celebrate our "800th", we will all be able, citizens and visitors alike, to see, touch and be awed, by a marvellous

Gerry Jones - Liverpool Musician

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work of art to remind us of our past, to be a focus for our civic pride, and to lead us confidently into a proud future."

"Ladies & Gentlemen, I commend to you this project for a THIRD LYVER BIRD.

Thank you."

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Just about the only way to really get to grips with the awesome scale of a Liver Bird is to become a Sparrowhall Scaffolder, as these three brave lads showed in 1979. Bobby Menagh, Peter Savage and Hughie Watson were working on the Liver Building, and popped up in their lunch hour. Wouldn't it be fantastic to have them at an Opening Ceremony! Sadly, Bobby Menagh died in 2005, but many of his large family would love to represent him.

*This remarkable photo was taken by Dan Donovan, who was also a scaffolder at the time, and knew these lads well.*

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## Some thoughts on funding the "Third Bird"

Fifty Thousand Fivers. The only quote we have for the scheme is £250,000. This is a daunting amount of money, but it can be looked at another way; i.e. FIFTY THOUSAND FIVERS comes to £250,000. If 50,000 people would give a Fiver, the job would be done. A Fiver doesn't get you much these days. Compare it with:

- a packet of cigarettes, (find some prices, about £4).
- a round of drinks for 2 or 3 people.
- a small snack at motorway services.
- six litres/less than two gallons of petrol.
- admission for one to a night-club. (get some real prices)
- if everybody going to a "Derby" game gave a fiver, just once, the job would be done. Perhaps if we could promise the Clubs that they could put a giant scarf round its neck after any Famous Victory.
- 

To put it another way; here is a letter I emailed to the Echo on 9th Jan 02, after one reader thought I wanted all football fans to give money at every home game!

"There are already some misunderstandings about my ideas for funding a Third Lyver Bird. The worst-case is if the City cannot obtain or provide any of the £250,000 quoted. My idea then is to look at this large sum in a different way - to think of it as "50,000 Liver Fivers", and to picture 50,000 people we just need to imagine the crowd at a "Derby" match. If 50,000 people - reds, blues or neither - were willing to give a "one-off" fiver, then such an appeal could close. Where this "every home game" idea came from I do not know.

Hopefully, there would be some corporate sponsorship from a dozen companies who would like to buy the right to engrave their company name in a segment of the clock-dial base. A dozen local firms may well consider it a good investment at £5,000 for a hundred years worth of publicity in a prime spot. That in itself would ensure the Dial being laid. Hopefully, just £100,000 of "matched funding" would be needed. Maybe a local millionaire might fancy paying for the whole scheme in one go! We live in hope.

Gerry Jones - Liverpool Musician

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But, as the R.C. Cathedral was built with "the pennies of the poor", I would like to see this Bird representing the wishes of your average scouser - and his Fiver.

## **Fifty Thousand Fivers!**

Everyone thinks it would be great to have a Third Lyver Bird in Liverpool, ideally in Queen Square, but the only quote we have so far is for £250,000 which is one big amount of money. But just for a moment, try looking at it this way; if fifty thousand people were to give just a Fiver, we would have that money - and the Bird! What does fifty thousand people look like; well, if you imagine one of our Premiership stadiums, full of people for a "Derby" match, there's your 50,000 (near enough).

## **Book of Bird-Lovers?**

I'm a LIVER FIVER GIVER A scheme may well be devised whereby anyone who gives a fiver can have their name (or the name of someone they choose, living or dead.), in a Commemorative Book of Donors. That should we call it? Book of Bird-lovers. Bird Book. Liver's Fivers Givers. This could be kept in the museum of Liverpool Life. (...or in a Museum case at the Bird, (in all weathers? maybe not!).

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## **Some Liver Bird Photos**



Here we are in Liverpool... ..but can you see the Liver Birds

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## Some liver Bird Photos continued



University of Liverpool



Liverpool F.C.



City of Liverpool



John Moores University



New Z Bar Bird



Red Moon Bird



Williamson Square "Idea"



Albert Dock "Idea"



The Mersey Chambers Bird



Liverpool F.C. in wood



"Anon" Liverpool Echo

How many Liver Birds have you spotted?

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Try working your way through this list... And then find some more to ADD to the list.

- The Royal Liver Building WEST Bird; looking out over the River, above THREE clock faces.
- The Royal Liver Building EAST Bird; looking out over the Town, above ONE clock face.
- The Mersey Chambers Bird, seen from the lawn grounds of St Nicholas Church at the Pier Head.
- A bird in the "Museum of Liverpool Life", (which used to be on the Old Market?) This is not very large, more like the Mersey Chambers bird.
- NewZ Bar, Water Street. Opposite India Buildings. (Unusual; it has no "liver" in its beak.
- "10 Water Street" (just above the door).
- The Liverpool City Coat of Arms Yes; it has three in it.
- University of Liverpool; Has three in its coat of arms and badge.
- John Moores University logo. a very distinctive and modern stylised version.
- Liverpool City logo. a single bird on a banded base.
- On all City vehicles.
- Liverpool Football Club, they have a selection of badges and logos. Liver Launderettes.
- Bollards throughout the city centre.
- The "City of Culture Bid" logo, reminiscent of origami.

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## External Web Pages concerning The Liver Birds

### Timbo's Liverpool

*Sections available include; Docks, Landmarks, Beatles, Music*

### Liverpool Monuments

*The title says it all – well worth a visit*

Gerry Jones - Liverpool Musician

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## A Psychedelic Liver Bird

*from the sixties introduces a site for artwork with a Beatles theme*

## LiverBirdology.com

*A pictorial history of Liverpool's most famous icon*

## Merseysmouth

*A miscellany of stories, poetry, and anything to do with Liverpool and Merseyside*

## Mike Royden's Local History Pages

*Local History of Liverpool and its Hinterland*

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## An Enlightening article about The Liver Birds

*supplied by Richard Edwards of "People & Brand" at Royal-Liver Assurance.*

Undoubtedly the most famous elements of the Royal Liver Building are the Liver Birds, which have become icons in Liverpool and recognised the world over. The myth goes, that if the birds fly away Liverpool will sink into the Mersey. Fortunately they have never flown but once, in 1946, they were unclad so repairs could be carried out on their steel skeletons.

These giant birds were created by German sculptor, Carl Bernard Bartels, who won an international competition to design the icon that would adorn one of the world's most exciting new buildings. The birds were made by the Bromsgrove Guild, a group prominent in the Arts and Crafts movement. They weren't Liverpool's first Liver Birds; indeed, there are many different depictions within the Royal Liver Building, let alone the city itself. They are, however, now considered the "standard" icons in Liverpool and the most widely reproduced image of the bird, an example of which may be seen on the jerseys of Liverpool Football Club.

While the Liver Birds soared to the heights of international fame, their

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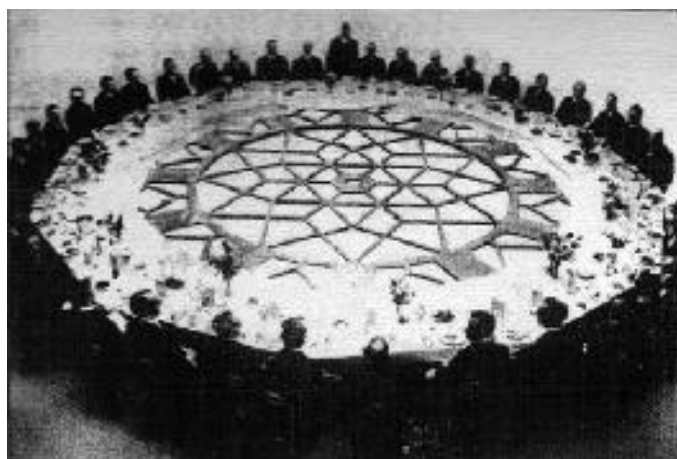
creator, Bartels, sadly faded into obscurity. Bartels was a wood carver from the Black Forest who came to Britain in 1887 at the age of 21. He soon became a naturalised Briton settled in London with his wife and young daughter. However, three years after the Liver Birds first perched in their new nest, the Great War broke out and with it came a great deal of anti-German sentiment, especially in Liverpool, where many Germans had settled. It was during this period when the original sketches and designs drawn by Bartels were lost or destroyed and the man himself was interned, with others of German origin, in a camp at Knockaloe on the Isle of Man.

In Liverpool, anti-German feelings reached their height when the Lusitania, on its way to the city's port, was sunk by the German navy. From this point on, the cultural contributions made by Germans in the UK began to be written out of history and so the name Carl Bernard Bartels faded into obscurity. The man himself died, unknown, in London in 1955. The birds created by Bartels perch 322 feet above the ground and are 18 feet tall. Each wing is 10 feet long and the birds' legs have a two foot circumference. Each bird weighs four tonnes in total. The Liver Birds are not statues but were built in situ, fashioned from the steel frames that make up the building's domes. Some of the girders that form the birds are 25 feet long and the "skeleton" is then clad in gilded copper.

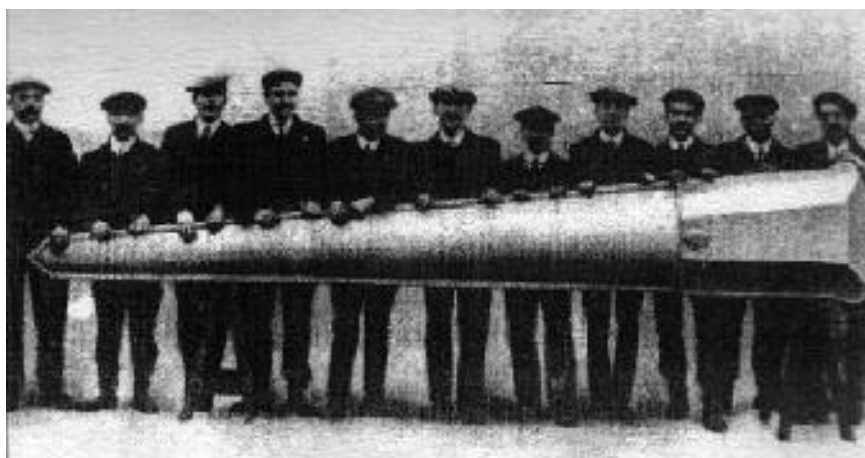
The origins of the Liver Bird still cause some debate, perhaps originally a crude reproduction of an eagle from one of Liverpool's (badly drawn) ancient seals, produced by an artist who had probably never seen an eagle. This theory fits because the eagle of St John the Evangelist was adopted by King John, who granted the city its charter in 1207 but the seal of Liverpool developed over the years to become a cormorant-type bird as artists became more sophisticated and ornithologically aware. This seems the most probable basis for the identity of the Liver Bird but ultimately it is simply a mythical figure like the phoenix or the gryphon. Interestingly, they are not feathers in the birds' mouths but are more likely broom, the leaved branch that was a symbol of the Plantagenets, the family of King John.

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## Two Historic pictures of The Liver Building Clock



One dial, as a banquet table for the directors



One of the Clock's minute hands

It was on 18 July 2005 that I first heard about the actual sculptor of the Liver Birds. Until then we all tended to believe that the Birds were "the brain child of Aubrey Thomas, architect of the Royal Liver Building,," as Paul Kennedy. says, Dec. 26th 2001.in an Echo article on NewZ Bar Liver bird, which has no "laver" in its beak.

"The Liver Birds appeared in 1910, the brain child of Aubrey Thomas, architect of the Royal Liver Building. Although the birds are mythical,

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they were modelled on the cormorant, which in earlier times was known as a "laver bird" (laver meaning seaweed GBJ). The cormorant is a common bird in the Mersey. The Laver bird fed on seaweed which the Liver Bird carries in its beak. The Liver Birds are 18 ft tall, and have a 12 ft wing span (must mean per wing GBJ), And are made from heavily gilded hammered copper. ( copper yes; gilded, I think not; GBJ).

Fri. 4th Jan 2002. Echo Article on Gerry Jones and project. By Jane Woodhead; she says Liverpool has three Liver Birds, two at the Pier Head. The third is on Mersey Chambers by St. Nicholas' Parish Church, and is half the size. The Liver Bird was created after the original Seal of the city, which was the Eagle of King John, was destroyed in a siege. The replacement looked more like a sea-bird, and became known as the Liver Bird.

Leaflet as issued by Royal Liver Company in 2000, giving facts about the building. Foundation stone laid 11 May 1908 It was opened by Lord Sheffield 19th July 1911. Height to top of Liver Birds is 322 feet. Height of the actual Liver Birds, 18 feet. Diameter of clock dials 25 feet i.e. 2,5 feet wider than Big Ben dials. Weight of opal glass in each dial one ton.

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*Here's an article from the internet by Reg Jones ("a Liverpool Iconoclast!")*

## **"What's a Liver Bird?" or " An Ornithological Enigma"**

Above the heart of Liverpool the eponymous fowl flaps its wings, a landmark for mariners atop the famous building which bears its name, a heraldic device for schools and colleges, the badge of my own 23rd Armoured Brigade, a totem for the city and the Corporation, borne on the coat of arms of ancient tramcars, but false and fictitious as the roc and dodo. The 'Liver' in Liverpool is a corruption of the word used by the aborigines of the area, who being Ancient Britons spoke Welsh. to describe the geographical location of the original hamlet, Llethr-pwll,

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(Still in Welsh, Lerpwll, "the slope by the creek"), still preserved in a nearby area as Litherland).

Then what kind of bird was it meant to be? The story begins on Mount Ida, near Troy, where Zeus the King of the Gods espied a handsome youth and sent down an eagle to pick up the child Ganymede and carry him up to Olympus to be his cup-bearer. Now the Lords of Stanley in South Lancashire happened to be the hereditary cup-bearers to the Kings of England, and one of them was advised by a wise man, presumably a monk with classical knowledge, that this legend was appropriate to his feudal duty, so he adopted as his blazon the Eagle and Child, a device still seen on many inn signs locally.

But when it came to designing the seal some local craftsman, who had probably never seen an eagle, drew a bird which rather resembled a duck, and not knowing that the eagle carries large items of prey in its talons, attached the strange burden to its beak. Subsequent copyists did little to improve the device, so that the 'child, looked more like a fish, a twig or a leaf and the carrier looked like a cormorant, a bird which I often saw before the war in the estuary, an apt sample of Mersey marine life. Then by artist's license the legs were lengthened and the shape was more like that of the heron. Hence by a false derivation the product of an artist's imagination was immortalised as a Liver Bird. Sorry, folks. A Liverpool Iconoclast!

This is supported by a LIVERPOOL HERITAGE WALK booklet which contains the following; The mythical Liver Birds are made of copper and are 5.5m( 18 ft) high. The clock faces are 7.6m (25') in diameter, making them the largest public striking clocks in Britain. The origin of the Liver Bird is as follows:-

King John, in 1207, requiring a port for the conquest of Ireland, granted letters patent to Liverpool, and the town adopted a corporate Seal, - the eagle of St. John, the emblem of the House of King John. During the siege of 1644, when cavalier forces sacked Liverpool, the seal was lost.

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In 1655 it was replaced by a second seal, but this did not resemble an eagle, possibly due to the ignorance or artistic shortcomings of the designer. As time went by, the bird, which looked like a seagull, came to be regarded as a cormorant, as such birds are prevalent in the Mersey. In the birds beak is a sprig of foliage, probably of broom, the "planta genista" of the Plantagenet royal family.