

MANOR ROAD, LISCARD
VILLAGE, WALLASEY
MERSEYSIDE CH44 1DA

WALLASEY UNITARIAN MEMORIAL CHURCH



TRADITION: UNITARIAN

BUILT: 1899

CONGREGATION ACTIVE
UNTIL: 1993

LISTING: GRADE II*

OS GRID REFERENCE:
SJ309922

FREE STYLE ARCHITECTURE AND
ARTS & CRAFTS FITTINGS



TRANSPORT

The nearest rail stations are Wallasey Village and Wallasey Grove Road, from which buses connect to Liscard town centre, 3 minutes walk to the church in Manor Road.

Car parking available in adjacent streets.

VISIT US

The hall and rooms are used by Wallasey School of Ballet, so are open by prior arrangement only (020 7481 0533) subject to class times. The exterior is clearly visible from the street.

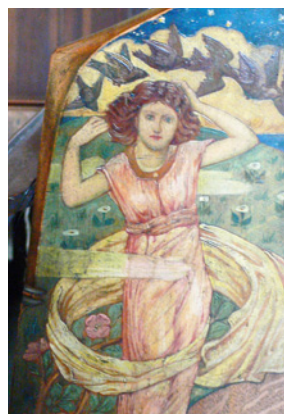
Disabled access is available by lift.
WC and kitchen facilities.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The Wallasey Unitarian Memorial Church was built in 1898-99 under the patronage of wealthy Unitarian Mrs Martha Elam, in memory of her late husband William (1821-96). Unitarianism is a Christian denomination rejecting the idea of the Holy Trinity, viewing God as one being and Jesus as a prophet and moral authority; it was supported by many wealthy mercantile families in Liverpool and Cheshire in the 19th and early 20th centuries. One of the architects of the church, Edmund Rathbone, was also from a prominent Liverpool Unitarian family, who as leading bankers had opposed the slave trade on Christian moral grounds. This was an unpopular stance among many who grew rich on the trade. The present day investment management company Rathbone Brothers plc is its successor. Edmund's brother Harold contributed to the interior of the church in the form of the reredos, the altar screen made by his 'Della Robbia' Pottery, a ceramic factory based in Birkenhead which though widely admired was never a commercial success and closed after a few years.

Wallasey's importance rests on the concentration of work executed by leading figures in the late Victorian artistic and architectural spheres contained within, and stands physical testament to the vigour of the Unitarian movement's religious conviction and self-confidence.

*... decorated in a style new, so far as we are aware,
to this country. ~ The Inquirer, 1899*



Above: Rathbone's reredos. Right: Choirstall detail.

THE HALL AND ROOMS ARE
THE BASE FOR WALLASEY
SCHOOL OF BALLET

WALLASEY IS
AVAILABLE FOR
LECTURES AND
MEETINGS –
SUBJECT TO BALLET
SCHOOL USES.

To find out more visit www.hct.org.uk or contact chapels@hct.org.uk

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THE EXTERIOR

The church is striking in its innovative Art Nouveau decoration, unusual in nonconformist places of worship – at the time of its construction the Unitarian journal, *The Inquirer*, described it as being 'decorated in a style new, so far as we are aware, to this country.' The church, built of red brick with stone dressings, is Flemish in style in contrast to the Gothic Revival style popular amongst Anglican churches at the time, and the church could be mistaken for an attractive public library, making little of its role as a place of nonconformist worship.

Furnished in the English Arts and Crafts style, a movement that promoted traditional forms of pre-industrial craftsmanship and design, it contains fittings by many craftsmen associated with the Bromsgrove Guild of Applied Arts, an organisation that was later responsible for the Liver Birds atop the Royal Liver Building at Liverpool Pierhead.

Before you enter, note the decorative ironwork designed by Walter Gilbert, one of the founders of the Bromsgrove Guild. Benjamin Creswick, another Guildsman, sculpted the porch, depicting Meditation, Eloquence, Devotion and Music.

THE INTERIOR

Inside, look up at the copper light fittings, also designed by Gilbert.

The painted communion table, pulpit and choir stalls were all executed by Bernard Sleigh, illustrator and Guild member. The pulpit has three painted panels representing Intellectual Truth, Moral Goodness and Spiritual Beauty, while the choir stalls are decorated with figures depicting the elements earth, wind, water and fire. The table shows Christ in Majesty (that is, enthroned) with Faith and Charity on either side.

Across the wall over the altar is Harold Rathbone's ceramic reredos, depicting the mother and child, and inscribed with the words 'And what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and love mercy, and to walk honourably with thy God.' This is the largest piece of Birkenhead Dell Robbia ware ever made.

The pulpit and choir stalls with paintings by Bernard Sleigh.



FURTHER READING

Jenny Freeman, 'Rescue, Repair, Regeneration', *The Victorian* (Nov. 2007 no. 26), pp. 9-11.

Graham Hague, *The Unitarian Heritage: An Architectural Survey of Chapels and Churches in the Unitarian tradition in the British Isles* (Sheffield, 1986), p.94.

Newsletter of the North West branch of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (December 2002, issue 5)