

Liverpool Clarion

An account of activity in Liverpool

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The Clarion Van

The Clarion Movement in Britain was based upon the readership of the Clarion newspaper edited by Robert Blatchford established in 1891.

Local groups were formed to support the socialist aims of the newspaper, and Liverpool Clarion spearheaded by socialist pioneers like Robert “ Bob” Mason and Julia Dawson ensured that Liverpool Clarion was soon at the forefront of the Clarion Movement. (Liverpool Clarion picture below).



The Liverpool Clarion movement was soon supporting “progressive” candidates in the council elections in November 1894.

Soon the Clarion movement established various Clarion clubs such as Ramblers, Field Craft, photographic, drama, handicraft and its most famous club Clarion Cycling Club.



The ARK”

The Clarion Cycling Club was established in Birmingham on 24th February 1894 and the Liverpool Clarion Cycling Club was established in late (possibly September) 1894 and was therefore one of the first to be formed. The Liverpool Clarion Cycling club meet at “the Ark” at 65a Kensington from 1895.

The first Honorary Secretary of Liverpool Clarion Cycling Club was Mr H. Cummins of 25 Rupert Grove, Rupert Lane, Liverpool. Cummins reported that many “Clarionette cyclists in Liverpool were holding aloof” he also reported in the Clarion 13 April 1895 that they were very keen to involve lady Clarion cyclists

“Votaries of the wheel”

In the Clarion of October 7, 1894 he stated “Allow me on behalf of the members of the club to thank you very much for the prominence you have given to our doings, they have given us a splendid advertisement (advertisers please note). Today we met at Newsham Park at 10 a.m, proceeded to Cronton, through Knotty Ash, Broad Green, Huyton, Roby, and Tarbuck.

We distributed lots of literature and had a most enjoyable picnic. Returned to Liverpool about 2.00 a.m. I hope all Clarionette cyclists will join us, and so spread the good news among the heathen. As for those who haven't a 'bike' let them sell their shirts and buy one. P S Next Sunday's run to Chester; meet at Birkenhead boat at 2.00 p.m.”

In 1894 Liverpool Clarion established a Liverpool Clarion Scouts section which was propaganda to outlying villages such as at Knowlsey on the Earl of Derby's estate. the Clarion 6th October 1894 states

“Just concluded two splendid runs – from Knowlsey where his lordship the Earl of Derby did not invite us to dinner but his tenants were supplied with Clarions and Clarion leaflets. We also called at the Police Station and left some tracts for the edification of the gentlemen in blue. After assimilating the cow-juice we returned home.

In the afternoon several of us had a spin to Heswell. Here we discovered three Clarionettes and after fraternising with, also enjoying a good tea and distributing some Clarion leaflets, we made tracks for Birkenhead, arriving in Liverpool at eight o'clock.

Next Sunday meet at Newsham Park gates at 10.00 a.m. for a run to Cronton.”

Liverpool produced stickers and labels. these

were about four inches by two inches, printed in black on red, with the reverse side gummed. they could be stuck on telephone poles, gates and walls - even, it was suggested the flanks of grazing cows ! also available from Liverpool were stencil plates for printing slogans - seen as an advance on decorating pavements with chalk which could be done on a fine, dry night

The Clarion produced a booklet “Merrie England” based on a series of articles by Robert Blatchford in August 1894, producing 100,000 copies at a penny a copy. Liverpool Clarion scouts sold 5,000 copies of “Merrie England” at just one international football match played in Liverpool.

One of the first actions of the Clarion was to organise a Clarion Van to visit the poor areas of Liverpool and not only offer cheap soup but also promote the virtues of socialism.

The van had been offered by William Ranstead a Cheshire businessman who had put up £250 to set up the Clarion newspaper.

The van was used on the streets of Liverpool as a soup van, selling bowls of soup for a farthing to the poor and unemployed. As well as acting as a bill board for posters advertising the Clarion. This van would later become famous when it was used as the van in the first Clarion speakers tour in the summer of 1896.

The great Wallasey socialist, feminist and author of Clarion women's page Julia Dawson envisaged the Clarion Van speaking tour securing significant strategic support from the Clarion Cycling Club and Clarion Scouts “big brothers” there on bikes to greet the Van's arrival in towns and villages, and that sisters will get their work done early that day to join the gatherings”.

The call for money and volunteers was quickly

answered. A leading socialist speaker Caroline Martyn, undertook to join the van for a whole month, helped by young and able workers such as Ada Nield, an elected socialist member of Crewe Poor Law Guardians and Catherine Mayo an organiser and lecturer for the Women's Co-operative Guild.

Julia Dawson proudly announced that this would be "The first Socialist Van ever put on the road by women" The Van's route in Summer 1896 was to be Chester, where the "Lone Scout", Bob Mason and his Liverpool comrades would provide assistance; then the Clarion van would travel through Shropshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Lancashire and Yorkshire concluding in County Durham.

Liverpool Clarion Cycling Club announced to its members in the Clarion that there would be a big send off for Julia Dawson's Clarion van from Chester market place at 4.30 p.m. on Saturday 13th June 1896.

Two members of the Clarion board would be present Bob Mason "Lone scout", Joe "the Waggoner" O'Donnell and his son Will - all three veterans of the Liverpool soup Clarion van. On the appointed day thousands of well wishers turned out in brilliant sunshine to see the first Clarion Van on it's way, headed by the Liverpool Clarion Brass Band and followed by a column of fifty Clarion cyclists and a crowd on foot marching to the inspiring strains of the "Marseillaise".

As for the Clarion van tour, the Clarion reported that despite constant rain, it had been a successful venture. One of the Clarion women speakers Ada Nield had according to one report developed into an effective speaker, with clear head and firm grasp of facts, her hold over audiences resided in her gift for telling phrases, her eagerness and animation, and her sincerity; also, according to several witnesses, in her

appearance - her colouring, and her mobility of her expression. she was very pretty, with grey blue eyes, a fair complexion and beautiful curling auburn hair.

The Caroline Martyn Memorial Clarion Van made its first appearance outside St George's Hall in Liverpool on 1st June 1897 before a crowd estimated at over one thousand.

Liverpool Clarion Club House



Halewood Clarion Club House

Liverpool (Halewood) Clarion Club house opened in 1907 but was closed by 1912. Liverpool Cycling Club regularly cycled to Manchester Clarion club House at Handforth, Cheshire opened in 1903

Liverpool Clarion Cafe & Restaurant

The Clarion newspaper in August 1917 states that Liverpool Clarion has a Clarion Club and public cafe restaurant at 30 Lord Street and 25 Cable street. social and propaganda meetings constantly. Now under new management.

Robert "Bob" Mason - The Lone Scout

Bob Mason or "Manzona" or "Lone Scout" was prominent in Liverpool labour movement for forty years and a key figure in the Clarion Movement, According to the Labour Annual he was "tall, handsome man, of great personal charm, and with a gift for writing which it is said would have

brought him fame if he had chosen to follow this path.



Robert "Bob" Mason – The Lone Scout

Mason was the founder of the Pezzers club which met at the "Drum" 57 Hunter Street and in 1896 organised the first Pezzers Razzle which took the form of a mid winter nocturnal ramble led by mason over the field of the Wirral ending with breakfast in some cottage.

Fred Bower close friend of Mason, Bob Mason was later the manager of the Clarion Cafe in Williamson Street, Liverpool for many years the meeting place of Liverpool's progressive elements

When Robert Blatchford the editor of the Clarion lent his personal support to British Governments war on the Boers in the Transvaal, South Africa in 1899, Mason was so disgusted that he painted a great black cross over his picture of the prophet "Nunquam" (Blatchford's pen name) in the Club house. support for British in Boer war 1899.

Julia Dawson - Socialist Pioneer



JULIA DAWSON.
No. 28. Published by Women's Socialist Society.

Julia Dawson – Socialist pioneer

Julia Dawson was in fact the pen name of Mrs Myddleton-Worrall of Wallasey, Cheshire. Mrs Worrall had been active in the Liverpool and Lancashire Socialist movement for a number of years.

In October 1895 she was asked to become the editor of the letters page "Our Women's letter" of the Socialist newspaper "The Clarion", a position Julia Dawson held until 1911. She had taken over the role from fellow Liverpool socialist Eleanor Keeling Edwards wife of the Joseph Edwards, Editor of the Labour Annual.

Jeannie Mole another early Liverpool Socialist and adherent to dress reform wore a Greek gown, the patten she handed down to Caroline Martyn and Julia Dawson.

Julia Dawson was also active in the Independent Labour Party, writing circa 1904 a booklet for the ILP entitled "Why Women want Socialism".

“under socialism every woman and child would be looked after by the State. the removal of poverty would alter relationships within the family and transform the quality of domestic life.”

She also attended the first Socialist Women’s conference in Stuttgart, Germany in August 1907.

Dawson championed the rights of the Lancashire cotton workers, who had become some of the most highly unionised, best paid women workers in the country with a commitment to equal pay, full suffrage and reproductive self determination.

We know very little else about Julia Dawson life, except that she may have died around 1947. Surely one of the most important British socialist deserves better recognition

William Ranstead (1859-1944),



William Ranstead

William Ranstead joined the newly formed Fabian Society in 1884 and became involved in both a practical and an intellectual way with the growing socialist movement

In 1894 Robert Blatchford, a journalist who edited the socialist newspaper the Clarion , published a book of articles from his newspaper called Merrie England. Shortly after reading this Ranstead visited Blatchford and gave him a cheque for £250 to finance the paper. This gift prevented the Clarion from folding. At Blatchford’s invitation Ranstead briefly took over the newspaper’s business operations, formed the Clarion Newspaper Company, in which

he invested £1,000, and became a founding director.

It was Ranstead who offered a suitable vehicle (later known as the Clarion pioneer van). The same van had been used before on the streets of Liverpool as a soup van, selling bowls of soup for a farthing to the poor and unemployed. As well as acting as a bill board for posters advertising the Clarion .

Later Ranstead emigrated to New Zealand with plans to establish a Clarion Colony in New Zealand.

Ranstead returned on a visit to Britain at the age of 54 while and enlisted in the British Section of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. In 1915 he served in the Mounted Field Ambulance at Gallipoli where three of his sons fought. He died in Hamilton on 24 March 1944,.

Fred Bower and the Secret of the Stone



Frederick John Bower (picture above) was a close friend of Bob Mason, Bower was born in 1872 in Boston, USA where his father was a stonemason, he returned to Dorset (his parents home) and later moved to Liverpool.

He travelled the world as a stone mason

but returned to Liverpool to work on the construction of Liverpool Protestant Cathedral.

Bower and the famous trade union leader Jim Larkin famously planted a sealed box in the foundations of the cathedral, in what became known as the "Secret of the Stone". On June 27, 1904, three weeks before the King, Queen, and civic dignitaries arrived, the men composed a message "from the wage slaves employed on the erection of this Cathedral to a future socialist society, and, along with a copy of the Clarion and the Labour Leader, placed it in a biscuit tin deep inside the brickwork and covered it.

"Within a stone's throw from here, human beings are being housed in slums not fit for swine," Larkin observed. Fred Bower Died 1942

Liverpool Clarion Cinderella Club



The first Cinderella Clarion Club to relieve the poverty of children in working class areas. It was first established in Manchester in October 1889 and soon spread to many industrial towns in the North organising education, clubs, trips, holidays and even convalescence children's homes (Birmingham, Dundee, London, and Nottingham) for the poor. Bradford socialist Margaret and Rachel McMillan were heavily involved in the Cinderella Clubs movement. According to the Liverpool Mercury of 11th January 1911, a Mrs Julia Dawson gave her annual super and concert for the cockle pickers on New Brighton Pier.

Liverpool Clarion Handicraft Guild

The Clarion handicraft Guild encouraged the art of jewellery making, pottery, book binding, furniture and printing. By 1904 the Clarion handicraft Guild had 30 branches throughout Britain and was holding annual exhibitions of its work, its first in 1901 and largest group unsurprisingly being in Liverpool and organised by Julia Dawson.

Note

Five Clarion Cycling Clubs were established 1894, the first being Birmingham:

Birmingham

Potteries (Hanley)

Liverpool

Bradford

Barnsley

Clarion Cycling Clubs established between January and March 1895

Nottingham

Newcastle

Leeds

Rochdale

Blackburn

Burnley

Wigan

Hyde

Nelson

Liverpool (Halewood) Clarion Club house opened in 1907 but was closed by 1912

Handforth Clarion Club House 1903 - 1936

Ribble Clarion Club House (Ribchester) 1913-1950s.