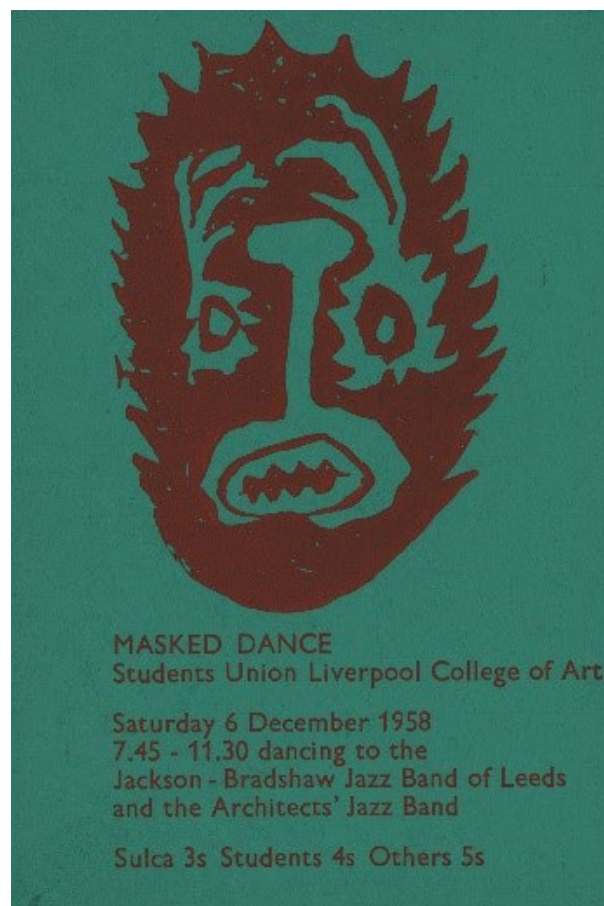


CHRISTOPHER OLIVE
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The Liverpool School of Art and its Archive: 1825-2025

Christopher Olive, LJMU Special Collections & Archives

Among the Colleges which would eventually join the Liverpool Polytechnic in 1970, and becoming LJMU in 1992, one of the oldest is the Liverpool School of Art, whose archival papers are managed by LJMU Special Collections & Archives.



LJMUH/SA/5/3/15/2/6, Admission Card for the LCA Students Union Masked Dance, designed by Alan Swerdlow, 6 December 1958.

Evolving from the 1823 Mechanics' and Apprentices' Library was the 1825 Mechanics' Institute, the earliest English School of Art outside of London – although the only real artistic instruction provided was a Ship Drafting class. In 1832, the school was renamed the Liverpool Mechanics' Institution and the Liverpool School of Art became first a separate Department of the Liverpool Institute, eventually splitting from the Institute in 1905 to amalgamate with the Applied Art Section for the University of Liverpool and later receiving the title of Regional College of Art from 1949 onwards.

Amongst the many treasures within its archive include: a comprehensive body of historical student artwork; student photographs; hand-drawn student magazines from as early as 1910; extensive design work and photography from the Department of Fashion c.1948-present; records of the student degree shows and dress parades; as well as administrative records, staff records, teaching material, and building plans.

Women in the School of Art



LJMUH/SA/5/7/2/23 and LJMUH/SA/5/7/2/26/2, Mixed Sex Life Drawing Classes, c.1900 and 1925.

Since the 1832 split, the school has had a long history of promoting the education of women. Women were from then onwards permitted visit the Art Library and to pay 1 shilling to attend any lecture but were not yet permitted to attend classes of instruction until the 1850s – which remained mostly single sex Ladies’ classes. Emma Gammage was the only female student in 1857 and became the first female qualified Art Pupil Teacher from the Liverpool School of Art in 1858.

In 1913, the Students’ Union was first formed with permission from the then-Principal George Marples out of the earlier Students’ Guild. One foundational issue the Union campaigned for was a Joint Sex (gender neutral) Common Room for ‘promoting social intercourse... for meals in common, for meetings and debates [and] for music,’ as well as for life classes in common. This was not granted until under the new Principal Henry P Huggill in 1939 within the first few months of World War Two. Former student and later tutor Nancy Price recollected that once the male students had been given permission to share the Ladies’ Common Room, ‘they came in and just stood there, and didn’t know what to do!’

Radical Approaches to Teaching



LJMUH/SA/5/7/2/3/1, Students Voting in a Mock Election, c. early 1930s.

Many early teachers at the school also took other unconventional approaches to teaching and directing, even at the expense of their careers. In 1843, Richard Norbury was appointed as a new Head of School, and immediately begun a rivalry with John Wright Oakes, one of the earliest and most beloved tutors. The dispute arose from Norbury's desire to cease all plein air sketching and field work, which Oakes resisted. Disobeying his new instructions, Norbury had Oakes cautioned for attempts to 'prejudice the minds of the pupils against their Headmaster,' and Oakes retaliated by initiating an enquiry into the 'incompetency' of Norbury as a teacher, which thirteen students supported by signing a petition of complaint against Norbury's 'inability to teach.' This forced the Headmaster Norbury to present his oil paintings with testimony before a School Committee as evidence but also led to the resignation of Oakes and the cautioning of his students who protested, including the expulsion of student John Denton.



LJMUH/SA/5/3/3/1/2, Artwork by Fashion Design Student Shirley Hughes, later beloved children's author and
illustrator, c. early 1930s.

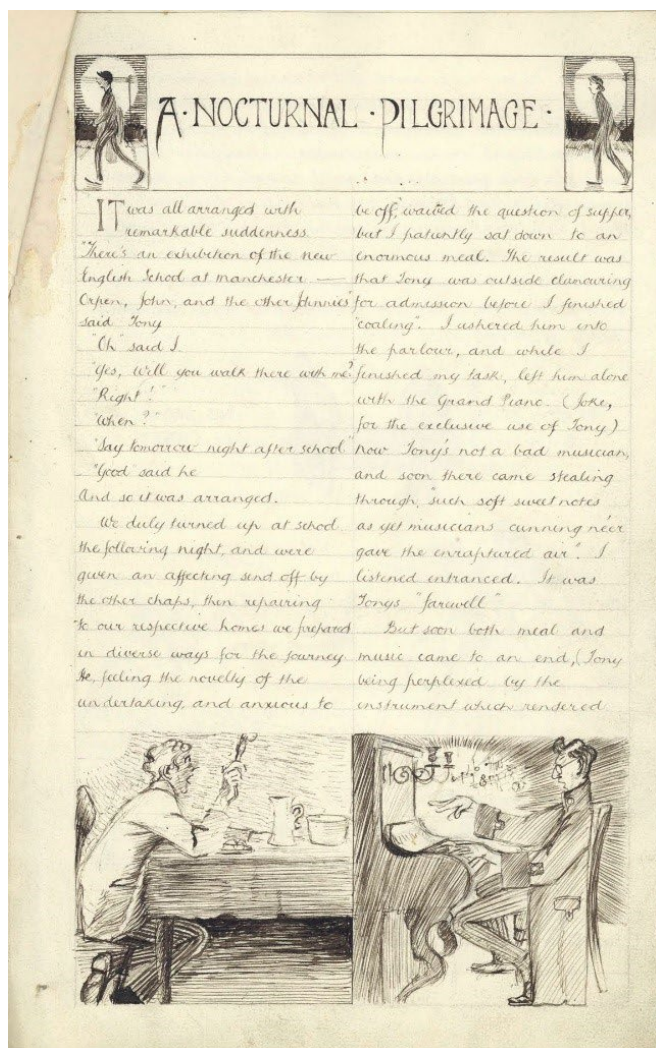
William Lennie Stevenson, who would later become Principal of the School 1951-1959, was also originally asked to leave the Liverpool School of Art in the 1920s as a student by his own Principal George Marples for his boldness in challenging traditional drawing methods. He would also eventually leave the role of Principal in November 1959 at least partially out of frustration ‘by too many members of the teaching staff proving unwilling to pursue his more radical ideas.’

It was a capacity for feeling: I had to become the element I wished to draw.
William Stevenson, interview 21 February 1984, conducted by Colin Morris, PhD,
Liverpool Polytechnic: *History of the Liverpool School of Art: 1825-1970* (1985).

The principal before him, Henry P Huggill, was also known for his innovation at the school, through lobbying for student scholarships and exhibitions, and establishing several experimental courses such as Fashion Drawing, Window Display and Salesmanship for the Tailoring Trades, Tailor's Garment Cutting, and Hairdressing courses, leading to record-breaking student numbers of over 1,000 by 1934 for the first time. Learning from his experience in service during the First World War, Huggill took quick and effective action as Principal during the Second World War to both maintain student numbers and continue to support students financially and in classroom wellbeing. He responded to damage from the Blitz through the skylight of Studio 67 by offering free tuition to any member of the armed forces stationed in Liverpool, and by forming a Fire Watching group and rota. The school also enrolled their first two students who were German Jewish refugees in 1939.

Student Magazines: The Comet and Maze

Among some of the incredible artwork by former students of the Liverpool School of Art are the two sets of student magazines, *The Comet* 1910-1913 which was entirely manuscript with only one copy for students to read communally in the common room, and *Maze or, the Confused Mirror of the Mind* 1951-1953, which was printed.



LJMUH/SA/5/4/1/3 The Comet No.3, November 1910, p.11 and p.20.

Topics covered include commentary and comic strips about student and Liverpool life; poetry; original artwork; an interview with the survivors of the flour bomb Battle for Sister Jane over the University of Liverpool's mascot doll; and an account of one of the two only Chinese students at the school in 1953.



LJMUH/SA/5/4/2/1 Maze Issue 1, June 1951, p.15-16.

Full PDF copies of these magazines are available to download from our catalogue (archives.ljmu.ac.uk) using Ref. No.s LJMUH/SA/5/4/1/1-11 and LJMUH/SA/5/4/2/1-2.

How to Access the Archives

LJMU Special Collections & Archives is open Mon-Fri 10:00-16:00 for anyone who is interested. You don't have to be a researcher, and our catalogues are all published online via archives.ljmu.ac.uk for you to browse our digitised material. You can also email us at archives@ljmu.ac.uk and we'll be very happy to help!

For further reading on the history of the Liverpool School of Art, see:

Charles W Hale, 1977. *A Short History of the Origins of Art and Design Further Education in Liverpool*. Available via LJMU Special Collections using Dewey code 707.11 HAL.

Colin Morris, 1985. PhD Thesis submitted to Liverpool Polytechnic *History of Liverpool Regional College of Art 1825-1970*.

Roger Webster and Shonagh Wilkie, 2017. *The Making of a Modern University: Liverpool John Moores University* (London: Third Millenium Publishing), pp.36-45.

A copy of all of these can be made available via LJMU Special Collections & Archives.