It’s Official! - Captain Nemo’s Nautilus was built in Birkenhead, England.

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Abstract

In the 1869 novel *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea,* the novelist Jules Verne writes that Captain Nemo’s *Nautilus* was completed at a ‘secret desert island location’ using different parts shipped in from across the world.

In a long list of manufacturers, Jules Verne slips in almost unnoticed that the iron plates of the hull of the Nautilus were made at ‘Laird’s of Liverpool’, which in reality is the Lairds shipyard of nearby Birkenhead.

The hull of a submarine is practically the whole visible structure, so, in external appearance at least, Captain Nemo’s Nautilus is a Birkenhead-built ship.

Jules Verne gives the Nautilus a double hull, and taking the figures given by Verne, it seems that between 70%–80% of the total weight of the vessel was manufactured at Lairds of Birkenhead.

Fantastic as this might sound, it’s perhaps not so surprising when you read Jules Verne’s history. Indeed, Jules Verne has many other links with Birkenhead and these are detailed on a new website launched today:

http://julesverneandtheheroesofbirkenhead.co.uk

The first three parts are posted today.

Part 1 From Birkenhead to Atlantis: The Merseyside Origins of Captain Nemo’s Nautilus.

Part 2 Jules Verne’s Love Affair with Birkenhead.

Part 3 Who was Jules Verne?

More postings are planned over the summer.

It is hoped that Birkenhead can use its links with Jules Verne in the same way that the nearby town of Prescot has used its links with William Shakespeare to help regenerate the town.

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Further Information.

Jules Verne was so successful at ‘hiding’ the Merseyside origins of Captain Nemo’s Nautilus that up to today (23/6/21) there is not one single entry on the internet highlighting Liverpool or Birkenhead’s contribution to the construction of the vessel. So, to all purposes, this is a new revelation!

Jules Verne gives the Nautilus an outer hull of nearly 400 tons on a double-hulled submarine weighing 1,300 tons. However, he neglects to give the weight of the thicker inner hull, also built at Lairds, a hull which resists the vast pressures of the ocean depths and is much heavier.

In Jules Verne’s *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1869), the Nautilus dives to the deepest known part of the ocean, so its hull must have been immensely strong and thick – and it is this heavier second hull that pushes Birkenhead’s contribution to between 70% and 80% of the total weight of the Nautilus.

This is a Birkenhead-built hull that, in fiction, at least, has to sail beneath the Antarctic Ice, help repel the giant squid, and glide over the lost city of Atlantis.

In the 1860s, Lairds had a reputation for building sections for steel ships to be assembled in remote

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locations; the best example was the explorer David Livingstone's ship the *Ma Robert*, which was assembled on the banks of the Zambesi River in 1858.

Quotes

'Historians agree that despite being assembled in a far-off location, the *Ma Robert* was a Birkenhead-built ship and I think we should also accept the same of Captain Nemo's Nautilus – one of the most famous vessels in modern science fiction.'

'Jules Verne first visited Liverpool and Birkenhead in 1859 – it was the first time he had ever set foot outside his native France.'

'Jules Verne wrote 54 novels in his set of stories called the *Voyages Extraordinaires*. The first novel *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras* (1864) follows a polar expedition that set off from … Birkenhead.'

'Verne's 1871 novel *The Floating City* describes his voyage on the *Great Eastern* from Birkenhead to New York'. 'The illustrations of the *Great Eastern* in the novel are some of the most iconic of the Victorian era and yet no one seems to realise that these views are of Birkenhead'. (see website)

'In 1860, the American George Francis Train introduced Europe's first tram system to Birkenhead; ten years later he became the first person to ever travel around the world in eighty days.'

'I will be meeting officials from Wirral Council next month to discuss these and my other findings about Jules Verne and Birkenhead to be serialized on my new website.'

'We should not underestimate the attraction of Jules Verne, he is the "Father of Science Fiction" and has been translated into more languages than William Shakespeare; he has been adapted for television and film more than any other author … and he obviously loved Birkenhead, which he called his "veritable suburb".'

'Lairds shipyard of Birkenhead had just completed the polar research vessel *The Sir David Attenborough*. Just prior to the launch of the ship, Sir David expressed his delight at the links between Lairds shipyard, Captain Nemo's Nautilus and his own vessel – his letter is on the website.'

'Jules Verne mentions Birkenhead or Lairds shipyard in a total of eight novels and these are all quoted in full on my website. The novels are:

Backwards to Britain (1859)

The Adventures of Captain Hatteras
(1864)

Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea
(1869)

A Floating City (1871)

The Adventures of Three Englishmen and Three Russians in South Africa. (1872)

The Survivors of the Chancellor
(1874)

An Antarctic Mystery (1897)

Travel Scholarships (1903)

There is also evidence that Verne's character *Robur the Conqueror* (1886) may have been named after the Birkenhead motto *Ubi Fides Ibi Lux et Robur* – readers can make up their own minds.'

The website 'Jules Verne and the Heroes of Birkenhead' is a nonprofit-making site; however, it will eventually be produced into book form as part of a trilogy of books:

Jules Verne and the Heroes of Birkenhead
(2022)

The Superheroes of Birkenhead

(2023)

The Mad Commodore (2024).

John Lamb, aged 58.

Former Head of Geography, The Liverpool Blue Coat School, England.

References for Verification

The origin of the hull of Captain Nemo's Nautilus being built in *Laird's of Liverpool* in the novel *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* can be found here;

Page:Works of Jules Verne - Parke - Vol 5.djvu/86 - Wikisource, the free online library

The statistics that I used for calculating that 70%–80% of the weight of the Nautilus (i.e. the double hull) was built in Birkenhead can be found here:

Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas by Jules Verne: Part 1 Chapter 13 (continued) - The Literature Page

The seven other novels where Jules Verne used ships built in Birkenhead / mentions Birkenhead are:

1. *Backwards to Britain* (1859)

Backwards to Britain - Google Books

2. *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras*
(1864)

The Voyages and Adventures of Captain Hatteras/Chapter III - Wikisource, the free online library

3. *A Floating City* (1871)

The Extraordinary Voyages: 41 Books in One Volume (Illustrated Edition ... - Jules Verne - Google Books

4. *The Adventures of Three Englishmen and Three Russians in South Africa* (1872)

Tales of Daring Voyages & Discoveries: The Jules Verne's Collection (38 ... - Jules Verne - Google Books

5. *The Survivors of the Chancellor* (1874)

The Survivors of the Chancellor (forgottenbooks.com)

6. *An Antarctic Mystery* (1897)

An Antarctic Mystery/Chapter 2 - Wikisource, the free online library

7. *Travel Scholarships* (1903)

Travel Scholarships - Jules Verne - Google Books

Initially, there are three articles on the website; a fourth and fifth regarding more findings about Jules Verne's intimate relationship with Birkenhead will be posted in mid-July 2021 and a sixth article in mid-August.

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