Local Council Confirms that Jules Verne's Classic Science Fiction Novel 'The Mysterious Island' is set in ….. Birkenhead!

Friday 5 November, 2021

Wirral Council, a local authority in the northwest of England has today confirmed that the French author Jules Verne set his classic 1874 science fiction novel *The Mysterious Island* in the town of Birkenhead, lying just across the River Mersey from Liverpool.

Alan Evans, Wirral's Director of Regeneration and Place has 'fully endorsed' the findings of local historian John Lamb, who has been researching Jules Verne's links with Birkenhead for the past three years.

Mr. Evans has stated in a letter to Mr. Lamb;

To find a book as important as Mysterious Island is set on the Wirral and has so many obvious connections to both our physical geography and Victorian Heritage has surprised us all.

We would like to confirm that we fully endorse your findings and are excited at what possibilities this may bring in future as we go about the regeneration of Birkenhead.

Jules Verne is the second most translated author of all time, ranking just behind Agatha Christie and ahead of William Shakespeare. He is known as the 'Father of Science Fiction' and famous for his novels *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864), *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865), *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1869), *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873) and *The Mysterious Island* (1874).

Mysterious Island is the sequel to Jules Verne's 1869 masterpiece *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* and marks the return of the infamous Captain Nemo and his fabled submarine the *Nautilus*.

Earlier this year, Mr. Lamb's website 'Jules Verne and the Heroes of Birkenhead' revealed that the hull of Captain Nemo's *Nautilus* had its fictional origins at Laird's shipyard of Birkenhead.

The website can be found here

Jules Verne – Just another WordPress site (julesverneandtheheroesofbirkenhead.co.uk)

A Direct link to the Mysterious Island webpage can be found here

6.-Jules-Verne-Sets-His-Classic-Novel-The-Mysterious-Island-in-Birkenhead.pdf (julesverneandtheheroesofbirkenhead.co.uk)

The website has previously been recommended by the Société Jules Verne in Paris.

The plot of *Mysterious Island* is set during the American Civil War and follows the adventures of five prisoners of war, who escape in a balloon from the Confederate Capital of Richmond, Virginia.

A storm sweeps them southwestwards for five days until they land on an unchartered volcanic island in the South Pacific.

One man already lives on the island, his name is Captain Nemo, and his submarine, the *Nautilus* is trapped in a massive sea cave. He observes the castaways and is so impressed with their efforts to survive, that he resolves to help them in any way he can without revealing his presence on the island. Nemo finally makes contact with the castaways when the erupting volcano threatens them all.

A Statement from John Lamb

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I believe this is one of the most important discoveries in modern science fiction as it reveals the writing style of Jules Verne in describing real life geographical locations in hidden deep metaphor.

For example, Birkenhead's Bidston Hill and lighthouse represent the island's volcano Mount Franklin while Birkenhead's main sewer outfall 'The Great Culvert' at Woodside Ferry becomes the cave dwelling 'Granite House' where the castaways will live for four long years.

The Birkenhead dock railway cutting at Argyle Street plays the role of Creek Glycerine, an artificial moat dynamited out of the bedrock by the castaways to protect themselves from attacks by orangutans and jaguars.

As an ex-producer of theatrical plays, Verne uses over 60 Wirral locations as his 'stage sets' in *Mysterious Island*.

At the end of the novel the volcano (played by Bidston Lighthouse) blows up leaving *a slab of granite battered by the waves of the Pacific, the tomb of the man who had once been Captain Nemo!*

The location of the *tomb of Captain Nemo* will be revealed in early 2022 but by then most Wirral residents will have easily worked it out for themselves.

Jules Verne is beyond genius, a giant of French and world literature, indeed he deals with metaphorical ideas and multiple plot lines in the same way that Albert Einstein would link random mathematical formulae in his head.

On a personal level I love the fact that Captain Nemo is a literary figure within the world of both DC comics and Marvel comics.

Nemo is an original member of DC's *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* - a Victorian version of the *Justice League* while the DC film *Aquaman* (2018) opens with Jason Momoa quoting Jules Verne.

In the Marvel comics series, Captain Nemo makes personal appearances in *Deadpool* and *Marvel Defenders* where it is suggested that he is the real father of the Sub Mariner, Prince Namor of Atlantis - a member of the *X-Men*.

Jules Verne's own personal interpretation of Atlantis will be revealed when we pay a detailed visit to *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* starting in the spring of 2022.

In Captain Nemo, there has never been a better opportunity to get a closer look at a literary antihero and Jules Verne will relate him to some of the great contemporary events of the 19th century.

I would like to thank Wirral Borough Council for listening to nearly three hours of my presentations, the content of which went way beyond the eight articles currently posted on the website.

I would compare Jules Verne to a movie director 'on a budget' who, by necessity, must shoot all the scenes for *Mysterious Island* in Birkenhead and the Wirral Peninsula.

Having a real peninsula play a fictional island helps drive Jules Verne's story lines and he comes up with the 'missing' south coast of Mysterious Island in the most incredible manner.

The Birkenhead and Wirral 'stage sets' revealed so far include.

Birkenhead Ferry Terminal at Woodside
plays the omnibus station at Richmond Virginia.

Hamilton Square, Birkenhead
plays 'The Great Square of Richmond'

Birkenhead Town Hall plays Richmond Town Hall.

Hilbre Island plays 'the islet' located just off the coast of Mysterious Island – the first landing place of the castaways' balloon.

The Wirral Peninsula plays the whole of 'Mysterious Island' or 'Lincoln Island' as it will be renamed – the riddle of the missing south coast will be solved in a later article.

Caldy Hill plays *a flat plateau like the one which overlooks Capetown* – this is the first view of Mysterious Island after the fog lifts over the islet.

Red Rocks beach at Hoylake plays *a pile of rocks that extended into the sea* – this is the point where the castaways wade ashore on Mysterious Island, having waited for the tide to go out.

Wormhole Cave at New Brighton plays the cave later known as The Chimneys – Verne correctly writes that this location is some eight miles away from where the balloon landed.

The 1822 Leasowe sea wall on the North Wirral Coast plays the *long breakwater*.

Meols sandhills play the *vast sandy region.*

Red Rocks reef plays *a very flat shoreline bordered on the open sea by a line of rocks whose tops alone emerged.*

A bunker on the 11th hole at Royal Liverpool Golf Club at Hoylake plays *a sort of excavation hollowed out in the rear of a high dune* where Captain Nemo secretly places the engineer Cyrus Harding after saved him from drowning off the north end of 'the islet'.

The statue of Tell the Dog at Tell's tower West Kirby plays the role of *Top* the dog – the faithful hound belonging to the engineer Cyrus Harding.

The Tranmere Brook (now covered by Borough Road, Birkenhead) plays the *Mercy River,* Jules Verne writes *The river will be for us a road.*

The steep 'Monkey Steps' alongside Tranmere's Taylor's Delph quarry play *a natural staircase* from where the castaways observe *amphibious monsters reposing in the surf* – this is a reference to Birkenhead's own *Leviathan,* Isambard Kingdom Brunel's *Great Eastern* which at the time of the writing of Mysterious Island had been lying at anchor in the adjacent Tranmere Sloyne for two years.

The Mountwood
(the highest point in Birkenhead and named Mount Pleasant in Jules Verne's day) plays a land of *a pleasant appearance and with a variety of flora* and will feature in one other novel.

The source of the Tranmere Brook at Shaftsbury Youth Club plays the *source of the Mercy*, and it too will feature in one other novel.

The rockery in Birkenhead Park
plays the volcanic rocks on the route to Mount Franklin.

Bidston Hill
plays the flat plateau of the volcano, later to be known as *Mount Franklin*.

Bidston Lighthouse plays the upper cone of the volcano – the *half light*.

The Bidston Lighthouse keeper's cottage
plays *the powerful abutment to the central cone cutting off the view to the northwest*.

The Vyner Road rock cutting
through Bidston Hill, Birkenhead plays the *deep crevices that had to be skirted* on Mount Franklin.

The River Mersey plays *the vast bay in the south east* later to be called *Union Bay.*

Birkenhead Docks at Wallasey Pool
play a lake *between the volcano and the east coast* – later to be called *Like Grant*.

The River Birket flowing into Wallasey Pool plays *Red Creek,* a river flowing into *Lake Grant*.

The mouth of the river Mersey plays *Shark Gulf* bounded by **New Brighton** on one side - *South*

Mandible Cape, and **Bootle Docks** on the other - *North Mandible Cape*.

The flat land of central Birkenhead, overlooking Liverpool plays *Grand View Plateau*.

And finally….

Storeton Woods in Bebington
plays *The forests of the Far West*.

Jules Verne's novels were originally serialised in periodical magazines, and I thought it best to use the same format in the form of a designated website and post one or two articles every couple of weeks.

This will take us in to the spring of 2022 when we can once again board Captain Nemo's legendary *Nautilus* and sail *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*.

I hope that when the even greater links between Jules Verne and Birkenhead are revealed that this will help attract investment from around the world to create an international tourist destination and help regenerate this historic Victorian town.

Next in 'Jules Verne and the Heroes of Birkenhead' (late November 2021).

Part 9 – The Castaways Make Their Home in Granite House - The Great Culvert Sewer at Birkenhead.

Part 10 – Captain Nemo's Sea Chest Washes Up at Rock Ferry, Birkenhead.

John Lamb November 5th 2021

Company Contact:

John Lamb

T. 0151 291 4598
E. cads.2la@gmail.com
W. https://...

Additional Contact(s):
cads.2la@gmail.com

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