

Mystery men behind the Aintree deal



WILLIAM DAVIES, Chairman of Walton Building Group.

A MYSTERY surrounds the Walton Building Company which has bought Aintree racecourse for £3 million.

Ever since it was founded the company has been owned entirely by its chairman, William Davies and his wife Jean. But then, eight months after he began negotiating for Aintree, Davies - who is probably Merseyside's most successful property speculator - sold almost half his voting shares to an unusually secretive company in the Isle of Man.

The buyer was a firm called Alton Ltd, which, despite its apparent wealth, does not have its own telephone. And its only address is the office of its accountants, Messrs Midgley, Snelling and Co in Victoria Street, Douglas.

Alton was formed in August 1972 by two men who took one share each. One was Neville Billington, an accountant who lives in 'Fairy Cottage', Laxey.

The other man we can only refer to as Horace. Horace, who is a clerk from Onchan, was apparently in such a hurry to sign up for his

stake in the company that his surname is illegible on the documents.

No other shareholders have so far emerged from the shadows. Late last year three directors did surface, however. They are Christopher Bowring, another accountant, who lives in the Channel Islands, and Percy and Rosina Woolford (also from the Channel Islands).

Walton Building Company was founded in 1959 by William Davies.

The Walton Group, which now includes half-a-dozen companies, has grown very rapidly in the last few years. In his report for 1971 (the latest available) bearded Mr Davies said the directors had valued the group's property at £1,673,000 (they had bought it for £396,377).

But he added that since the end of the year they had spent £1,900,000 on buying more property and the value of their assets had risen to over £5,500,000.

This clearly shows how companies

like Walton can benefit from rapidly rising values of land and property, while the effect for most people is that it becomes more and more difficult to get somewhere to live.

Among the group's biggest recent purchases are: Liverpool Stadium and surrounding area (for redevelopment); the old Smith Carpets store in Williamson Square (they paid £130,000 and knocked it down); an office block in Tithebarn Street; and the 70-acre site of the former English Electric factory at Netherton (for industrial development).

Within hours of adding Aintree to his list, Mr Davies told the press it was a bad buy. "I could have spent this money much more wisely in the city," he said.

Frankly, we don't believe him. Davies runs seven companies: Walton Building Co, Ricketts and Hubbard, Werlik Properties, William Thornton and Sons (Construction), Todd and Benn, Walton Commercial Developments and Atlantican Properties (Bootle). Let us know if you come across them!

VENTURE

(Continued from page one)

North-West Housing Association in 1971, and by the end of 1972 had spent £19,673, of which at least £4,200 was expenses and fees.

Venture is not a charity. It is known as a fee-generating association. Like all housing associations it cannot make a profit, but it can - and does - pay fees and expenses to committee members for the work they do. This is legal... at the moment... and it is extremely rewarding, because the bigger the scheme they dream up, and build, the bigger the fees.

Now Crawshaw, the MP and barrister, appears to be on the committee only as a figure-head, and probably receives no fee - or at most a nominal one.

But this doesn't seem to apply to some other members. Sir Harry Livermore, a solicitor, is chairman, and naturally keeps an eye on any matters affecting Venture in the City Council. Rightly he makes his interest known.

His firm, Silverman and Livermore, from which he is partly retired, seems to handle the legal work. And certainly Councillor McVeigh's firm, Anthony McVeigh, Estate Agents and Surveyors, represents Venture and handles negotiations over land.

The architect on the committee is Bill Richards, who has his own practice. He would be eligible for fees of about £27,000 if Venture's latest scheme in Grove Park is built.

In Manchester the Labour council refused to give favours to fee-generating housing associations and decided instead to treat them as property developers.

In Liverpool the Liberals, who now dominate the district council are pressing associations to modify their rules to stop committee members paying themselves fees. So far there has

been no response from Venture.

One step forward, however, is that Venture have agreed to let the corporation nominate tenants for the proposed flats in Grove Park, in return for the loan and CPO.

Grove Park is one of the sites where Venture have put in for planning permission without owning the land.

They have also done this twice on just one site stretching from 62 Laurel Road around the corner to 20 Holly Road, in Fairfield. After receiving offers from McVeigh "on behalf of Venture" the owner of land at 64 Laurel Road was taken aback to find that Venture had applied for planning permission... although he didn't want to sell.

And, just as surprising, is the case of Mr G E Doyle who owns 20 Holly Road, which is a garage, workshop and open space.

Last July a representative from McVeigh's estate agents called at 20 Holly Road and asked Mr Doyle to sell. He refused, despite offers of £1,800 and later £2,000.

Later in the year Mr Doyle's solicitor had a phone call from someone from Venture threatening to have the corporation CPO the premises. The Venture man seemed confident this could be arranged.

In November Mr Doyle put in his own application to build a day nursery there, but astoundingly in the same month Venture applied for permission to build three-storey flats on the same site. Mr Doyle was given just 20 days to appeal against the application.

In February this year, the Development Sub-Committee approved Venture's plans for the site.

According to the minutes Sir Harry, who was not on the committee, attended this meeting and spoke on another - unrelated - matter.

Also at this meeting, an attempt was made to CPO the site for Venture. The committee decided to ask the Housing Committee to CPO the land.

Linton says that on Tuesday, March 26, his father, who owns a garage next door, was "pushed and molested to the floor. The police were called and were really hostile towards me and made remarks such as 'Get back in your hovel'."

Then on March 28, after another attack and more threats, Pauline contacted Councillor Simey, and the whole family moved out. Late that night the house was entered and "all smashed up."

As a result of this incident Mrs Simey made her telephone call to Lark Lane police station. The McKays now have a copy of her statement describing how her pleas for protection were laughed at.

Linton McKay admits he's been in trouble with the police, and admits he doesn't stand idly by when his home, wife and relations are attacked.

He also believes the police are hostile to him because of an event two years ago. Then the police charged him and four of his friends with malicious wounding and attempted robbery.

But the judge dismissed the case after three days in the Crown Court, as a policeman admitted the police involved had got together to corroborate their evidence.

Nothing, however, excuses their discrimination against a family whose home was being attacked nightly, and who lived under the very real threat of having their home burnt down.

The McKays are now living with Linton's parents. To add to their worries, the only places the corporation have offered to rehouse them are Caryl Gardens and Windsor Street - both of which are near their former home.

PROPERTY... OH PROPERTY!

[Tune: The Red Flag]

*Property, oh property
That's the stuff we all agree
Houses land and lots of cash
Separates us from the trash.
We'll hang on to what we've got
The rest of you can slowly rot.*



*Learn your lessons from our gallows tree,
Keep your fingers off our property!*

*Property, oh property
Includes my wife and family,
All my slaves and servants too
Belong to me and not to you.
We'll maintain the status quo
-Us above and you below!*

Above is one of the songs from a recent production at the Everyman Theatre - a satirical attack on the propertied classes. One man who may not have found it very funny was the chairman of the Everyman and former Labour Lord Mayor Sir Harry Livermore. For Sir Harry himself is one of the propertied classes as this Free Press article shows...

LABOUR'S HIDDEN ASSET

HAROLD WILSON'S 'kitchen cabinet' are not the only members of the Labour party who like to dabble in land and property.

Right here in Liverpool the Labour party have a fine specimen of a property speculator.

His name is Harry Livermore, or more properly Sir Harry Livermore since he accepted a knighthood from the last Tory Government.

Livermore is a respected public figure. He's a former Lord Mayor of Liverpool, has been a councillor for many years and is a leading member of the Labour party.

And doesn't that party rightly condemn speculation and advocate the nationalisation of building land?

Livermore is perhaps best known as Liverpool's "Mr Arts" because he's chairman of the Merseyside Arts Association, chairman of the Everyman Theatre and was for many years chairman of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society.

But look a little closer and there's another side to the lovable Sir Harry.

He and his wife have over 3,000 shares in the Liverpool Daily Post and Echo... a paper regarded as 'anti-working class' by almost all Labour members.

Also, as we revealed in Free Press No 14, Harry owns 1,000 shares in - and is a director of - Sound of Merseyside, the new commercial radio station in which the Echo have a

Free Press

THE FREE PRESS has become the first 'alternative' paper in Britain to win an official award for journalism

In a competition organised by the Merseyside and North Wales Area Council of the National Union of Journalists, the title "News Reporter of the Year" went to Brian Whitaker, a Liverpool freelance.

Reports of the result in local papers skillfully overlooked one fact: All his articles had been published in the Liverpool Free Press.

The £50 prize is donated by the Ford Motor Company whom we have attacked on numerous occasions.

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large financial stake.

Closer detection reveals that without any doubt Livermore deserves the title 'property speculator.' And he's no dabbler or amateur. He's a very skilful and successful professional.

It's difficult to assess his wealth, because he's a director of a host of companies which are constantly buying up and developing sites.

He's a director and major shareholder in Liver Developments, Pentamere Ltd, Dale Street Investments, Robert May (Southport) Ltd, Fawnoak Properties and was a director of Bill Hannah's used car firm before it went into liquidation. And of course he's on the committee of the Venture Housing Association.

His companies are not set up to make a large annual profit. They aim to increase their assets. And they do this by speculation. They buy up land, houses, offices, and then try to develop them by obtaining planning permission.

Clearly they are successful. One of the companies, Robert May Ltd, had outstanding mortgages of £34,819 in 1969, but the mortgaged properties alone were worth £64,469.

Harry and his wife own half the shares in Robert May, which was set up "to acquire for investment purposes land and property of any tenure."

One example shows the way they operate. In May 1964 the company received a mortgage to buy 1,396 sq. yards of freehold land in Town Lane, Little Neston, and then in 1964 received a £14,000 mortgage to build four shops, houses and garages. By

1969 the company valued this development at £27,000... quite a profit.

Fawnoak Properties did much the same thing with 4,651 sq. yards of land off Grange Lane, Gateacre. They bought the land and received a mortgage of £76,000 from the General and Municipal Workers' Union in April 1969 - presumably to develop the site.

The previous July the company had applied for planning permission for 16 three-storey town houses (a glorified name for terraced houses) and one detached house. Permission was granted by the Planning and Building sub-committee in September. The houses were built and a profit made.

Then there is the strange case of the transformation of a piece of land in London Road - an area the corporation hope to improve - into a casino.

Dale Street Investments bought the land formerly 187 and 189 London Road and in 1969 received another mortgage from the GMWU, this time for £26,000.

In December 1967 they had gained permission to build a three-storey block consisting of shops on the ground floor, with offices above. This was built.

Then in February 1971, permission was given to use the first and second floors as a non-residential club.

Just a year later, in March 1972, Dale Street Investments got permission to use the ground floor as a club. By this roundabout route a patch of land became a casino, run by Metropolitan Casino Ltd.

Once more Sir Harry Livermore had triumphed.

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