

The Britannia  
**ADELPHI HOTEL**  
Liverpool

THE STORY OF A GREAT UNDERTAKING



**F**or nearly 200 years the Adelphi Hotel has been at the centre of the life of the city. The names of the Adelphi Hotel and Liverpool have gone together like peaches and cream and Lennon and McCartney.

### THE FIRST ADELPHI HOTEL

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The Adelphi Hotel that you see today is a much more modern building than the two 18th century town houses which were converted by William and Joseph Ewart to form the first Adelphi Hotel in 1827. It was bought the following year by experienced London hotelier James Radley who then acquired the two adjoining houses to enlarge the hotel. He made such a success of the venture that both his and the Adelphi's fame spread throughout Britain and Europe. It was even known as "Radley's Adelphi".



*The first Adelphi Hotel was fashioned out of a terrace of Georgian Town houses. Originally, the site was occupied by an 18th Century tavern call The White House which boasted a spacious concert room.*



## THE SECOND ADELPHI HOTEL

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The second Adelphi Hotel, built in 1876, bore no resemblance to its predecessor. It was a magnificent structure with nearly 300 bedrooms and 50 parlours, on a par with the best American hotels of the day. The guests' every need was attended to by 140 staff.

Liverpool dominated the transatlantic liner trade and a constant flow of steamship passengers, which included foreign princes and overseas ambassadors, passed through the Adelphi. It was also the hotel of choice for the Royal Family when they visited or passed through Liverpool. They would have marvelled at the splendid marble work in the corridors, and by the 1880's those corridors were lit by that most brilliant of inventions - the electric light bulb.

The second Adelphi Hotel was run by the legendary Mr Radley with the efficiency of a Swiss watch. No hurry or bustle was observed in the building; it had about it the calmful atmosphere of a private home





With the exception of one English chef to prepare the roast beef, all the cooks were French. Like its predecessor, the hotel's forte was the turtle soup enjoyed by Charles Dickens during his frequent stays at the hotel. The Adelphi's turtle soup was, quite literally, world-famous. Built into the design of the hotels were subterranean turtle tanks whose steam-heated water held up to 250 live turtles. The favoured green turtles were brought by ship from the West Indies and the Gulf of Mexico.

And it wasn't just the guests who enjoyed the delights of the Adelphi's turtle soup. In what was virtually a separate business, the hotel supplied upward of 60 litres a day to all parts of the UK, the Continent and even the USA. Organisers of grand banquets for nobility, merchant princes and civic corporations often specified that the turtle soup should come from the Adelphi. Leading members of the medical profession even prescribed it for invalids!







## DICKENS AND THE ADELPHI

As a result of the many readings he gave up and down the country, Charles Dickens became something of an expert on hotels. He loved Liverpool – “...that rich and beautiful port.” – and the Adelphi was his particular favourite. He first stayed there in 1838 and again in 1842 while he waited with his wife and maid to board Cunard’s historic steamship Britannia to sail to America.

In his *American Notes*, he heaps praise on “...my faultless friend, Mr Radley, of the Adelphi Hotel...” and described his dinner as “undeniably perfect”. After his last series of readings in Liverpool in April 1869, Dickens was collected from the Adelphi by the Mayor of Liverpool in his state carriage and transported to St George’s Hall to attend a banquet in his honour. He died the following year.

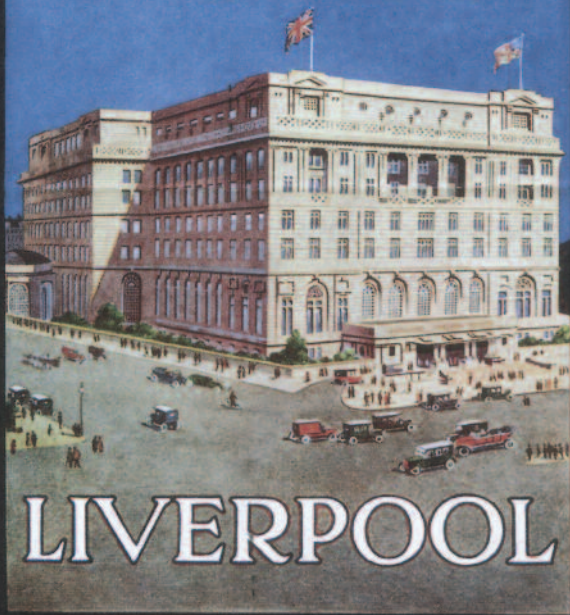


In 1892, Midland Railway Hotels, under the direction of another great hotelier, William Towle, acquired the hotel and re-named it the Midland Adelphi. However, some 18 years later the company decided that it was necessary to demolish the ‘confused, rambling dear old Adelphi’ and construct a completely new hotel.



MIDLAND

# ADELPHI HOTEL



# LIVERPOOL

*Original Adelphi luggage label*



## THE THIRD ADELPHI HOTEL

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This, the third Adelphi Hotel on this site, opened in 1914, on the eve of the outbreak of World War 1. It was to be the last city hotel that the railways ever built.

The commemorative guidebook issued to coincide with the opening of the new Midland Adelphi, as it was named, pulled no punches when it described it as '...the world's most palatial hotel.' Adding... 'All the modern innovations of New York hotels of the highest grade here combine with solid British comfort, and that subtle air of refinement characteristic of a Parisian salon.'

The architect, both of the exterior and interior was Frank Atkinson, F.R.I.B.A., and it was built by the old-established Liverpool firm of William Thornton and Sons. That new-fangled invention, the telephone, could be found in every bedroom along with a private bathroom. Money was no object; the hotel was designed with one thing in mind – the comfort of its guests.

Those guests could enjoy their leisure in either a Turkish bath or a full-size indoor heated swimming pool. In addition, there were squash and lawn tennis courts and shooting galleries. The public rooms were spectacular. The new Restaurant, decorated in Louis XIV style, was on a par with the finest London, Parisian



and Viennese restaurants. The most striking feature of the French Restaurant, designed in the French Renaissance style with more than a nod towards the Louis XVI period, were the walls which were panelled with sycamore, inlaid with rare woods and finished to a beautiful silver grey tone.

Opposite the French Restaurant, across the magnificent main court, was the Sefton Room which housed the Dining Room specialising in English cooking in its best form.





*French Restaurant*



*Hypostyle Hall*



*Lounge*





*Bedroom*



*Bathroom*



*Dining Room*



## CENTRE OF ATTRACTION

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From its earliest original form, the Adelphi has played host to the rich and famous. If Hello magazine had been published a century ago it would have had a photographer permanently encamped in the entrance lobby! From Kings and Queens to Presidents and Princes, dictators and Prime Ministers (same thing?!) to film stars and pop stars, the grand old Adelphi has seen them all.



Perhaps the strangest pair of celebrities that ever checked in to the hotel were 'Singing Cowboy' Roy Rogers and his horse Trigger who appeared on the balcony to be greeted by the cheers from his fans thronging the streets below. Story has it that during his stay at the hotel in 1954 Roy succumbed to flu and to cheer him up, Trigger was led into his room to present him with a bouquet of flowers and perhaps a Beechams powder?

The famous war-time leader Sir Winston Churchill was a regular visitor, meeting with the high command of the

Western Approaches based in an underground World War Two bunker just half a mile away. Rumour also has it that Adolph Hitler worked as a waiter here for a short time when he was a 20-year old visiting his cousin. No firm evidence has been uncovered to prove that young Adolph ever visited Liverpool but again there is no evidence to disprove it either!

Harold Wilson, Prime Minister of Britain from 1964 to 1976, always insisted on staying at the Adelphi whenever he visited his nearby constituency of Huyton.



He always booked the same suite, still dubbed *The Harold Wilson Suite* and still looking very much as it did during his premiership. Although The Beatles never stayed at the Adelphi, the annual Beatles Convention has been held here for many years.

The hotel achieved nationwide fame in 1977 as the subject of the warts-and-all hit documentary series *Hotel*. Who will forget redoubtable General Manager Eileen Downey or Banqueting Manager Brian Birchall's admonishment to the hotel's Head Chef - "just cook will yer"?



### **'WHITE MISCHIEF'**

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The 'Happy Valley' murder of the Earl of Erroll, who was killed by a bullet to his brain in his car in Nairobi in 1941, was a crime that has continued to fascinate down the years. Serial womaniser Lord Erroll was having an affair with Diana the beautiful young wife of ageing aristocrat Sir Jock Delves Broughton. As the prime suspect, Delves Broughton was arrested and stood trial for the crime but was acquitted. Six months later, in his room at the Adelphi Hotel, he committed suicide by morphine overdose. Why the Adelphi? Sir Jock lived in splendid fashion at Doddington Park, his stately home in nearby Cheshire and knew the Adelphi Hotel very well, every year before the Grand National Sir Jock held a sumptuous lunch for a hundred or more guests at the Adelphi. The story was turned into the successful film *White Mischief* starring Greta Scacchi and Charles Dance. An intriguing twist to the saga came in 2000 with Errol Trzebinski's book *The Life and Death of Lord Erroll: The Truth Behind the Happy Valley Murder*. The theory was put forward that a mysterious female assassin, acting on the orders of the British Government, murdered Lord Erroll, a British fascist who was in cahoots with Mussolini's Italian fascists and was therefore a war-time security risk. However many remain convinced that Sir Jock did the dastardly deed.



## THE BRITANNIA ADELPHI TODAY



*The vast lounge, perhaps the single most striking feature of the Adelphi, was featured in the blockbuster series *Brideshead Revisited* as the palatial interior of an ocean liner. The BBC TV drama *Lilies*, set in 1920's Liverpool was partly filmed in the Adelphi.*

*Below: original bathroom, wood-pannelled bedroom and bathroom fitting.*







*The massive Banqueting suite, added in the 1920's, can accommodate 700 people for a sumptuous banquet. A dividing wall which dramatically descends from the ceiling means that the room can be split in half for smaller functions.*



*Above: rich embellishments and hotel pool.*

*Left: the French Restaurant is laid out for a wedding reception. The hotel is licensed as a venue for performing civil weddings and is hugely popular, capable of catering for up to seven weddings in one day.*





## THE BRITANNIA ADELPHI TODAY

Most of the original features of the century-old Adelphi have survived.

Guests today staying on the first four floors still walk the heavily marbled corridors and have the opportunity of booking a room featuring original wood-pannelled walls, built in wardrobes and 'art-deco' bathroom fittings. They still can take a dip in the hotel's original swimming pool.

During the time that British Rail's subsidiary,

British Transport Hotels (BTH) owned the building, the top two floors were closed off and eventually ended up virtually derelict. By the time BTH came to dispose of all its hotels, the Adelphi was in a sorry state and faced the prospect of closure. However, rescue came in the form of Britannia Hotels who bought the building in 1982. They virtually rebuilt the top two floors, added extra bedrooms at the rear and now offer over 400 en-suite bedrooms. Britannia Hotels have spent many millions of pounds on refurbishment works over the past 25 years. In 2007 they embarked on a £7m renovation programme to convert the former basement tennis courts into a 1,000-seater conference centre, refurbish every bedroom, improve security, additional car parking, clean external stonework and generally freshen up the hotel.

Having enjoyed a glorious past for nearly 200 years, the Britannia Adelphi is meeting the challenges of the 21st century and its future is looking equally bright.



## THE BRITANNIA ADELPHI HOTEL FACTFILE

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- First Adelphi Hotel opened 1827
- Second Adelphi Hotel opened 1876
- Third Adelphi Hotel opened 1914
- Architect - Frank Atkinson, F.R.I.B.A
- Acquired by Britannia Hotels 1982
- Number of en-suite bedrooms - 402
- Conference capacity - 800 delegates
- Banqueting capacity - 700 diners
- Number of full/part-time staff employed - 400
- The hotel conference facilities now a part of the Elite Venue Selection
- The hotel won 'Best Events Venue' in the Lifestyle Awards in February 2020
- In May 2022, we have a staff member who reached 50 years of service at the hotel
- The hotel has been used in series such as Cilla, Peaky Blinders and even Netflix have used the hotel

### **Britannia Adelphi Hotel**

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