



Wirral writer to be honoured

Blue Plaque for Malcolm Lowry in New Brighton

Malcolm Lowry (1909-57), author of the classic modernist novel *Under the Volcano*, is to be honoured by Wirral Council with a Blue Plaque in his birthplace of New Brighton. The heritage plaque, to be unveiled on Lowry's birthday, 28 July, will be positioned on the sea wall looking out to the Mersey Estuary, a resonant site for a writer whose voyages took him across the oceans. The honour comes during Wirral's year as Liverpool City Region Borough of Culture.

The son of a Liverpool cotton broker, Lowry grew up exploring the Deeside of the Wirral after the family moved to Caldy. The topography of this Merseyside peninsular, with its beaches, woods, golf courses and lighthouses, set against the backdrop of North Wales, is vividly recalled in his writing.

Lowry studied literature at Cambridge, before leaving England for an eventful life in Europe, America, Mexico and Canada, where he settled, living in a squatter's shack at Dollarton on the Burrard Inlet, north of Vancouver with his second wife Margerie Bonner.

Here, during the Second World War, he completed his great novel *Under the Volcano*, set in Mexico as the world headed towards war. Structured around a single day – the Day of the Dead - in 1938, in the life of an alcoholic British ex-consul, the book is a richly layered meditation on the human condition and a portrayal of self-destruction.

Published in 1947, the book was hailed as a modern masterpiece and continues to be listed among the most significant novels of the 20th century. In 1984, it was adapted by John Huston for a film starring the late Albert Finney as the consul. In his life, Lowry had only one

other book published, *Ultramarine* (1933), based on his voyage as a young deckhand, sailing from Birkenhead Docks to the Far East. He left several unfinished books, short stories and poems, many of which were published posthumously.

Though Lowry never returned to Merseyside, his childhood haunts inform his writing, not least in his 'lost' novel, *In Ballast to the White Sea*, set largely in Wirral, Liverpool and Preston, and published in a scholarly edition in 2014.

Since 2009, a group of Lowry enthusiasts, the Firminists (named after the main character in *Under the Volcano*, Geoffrey Firmin) have been working with Bluecoat, Liverpool's contemporary arts centre, to research and celebrate the writer and reconnect him to Merseyside through an annual 'Lowry Lounge' programme. They have worked with Conservation Areas Wirral to realise the Blue Plaque.

Bluecoat's Artistic Director, **Bryan Biggs** said, "We are delighted that Wirral is recognising a talent as unique as Lowry's in this way. His influence is not just literary, but is seen in artists working across the creative spectrum around the world. This plaque will help shine a light on his birthplace and its importance to his writing".

Peter Bolt of Conservation Areas Wirral (CAW) said, "CAW is delighted on behalf of the Wirral Heritage fund to facilitate the supply of this Blue Plaque to commemorate one of Wirral's most prolific writers. We would like to think that, with its location overlooking the Mersey, it will inspire many more people to discover the magic of Lowry's work".

Lucy Barrow, Assistant Director: Culture & Visitor Economy at Wirral Council, said, "Wirral is the Liverpool City Region Borough of Culture for 2019, providing a wonderful opportunity to showcase the fantastic history and heritage of the borough and to honour people from Wirral who have made, and continue to make, internationally significant contributions to arts and culture. We are proud to be working with Bluecoat, Conservation Areas Wirral and other partners to mark Malcolm Lowry's connection to our special peninsula during our Borough of Culture year".

Poet, **Ian McMillan**, a fan of Lowry since his teenage years, who selected the writer as his choice for BBC Radio Four's *Great Lives* recently, said, "It's great to commemorate one of the North West's and the world's greatest writers in this way; a Blue Plaque like a giant piece of punctuation in a landscape that Malcolm Lowry knew so well!"

The plaque will be unveiled on **Sunday 28 July** at 2pm by the Mayor and Mayoress of Wirral, Councillor Tony Smith and Mrs Barbara Smith at New Brighton Promenade (opposite Marine Point security office). There will be a public programme of Lowry events this Autumn on

Wirral, including a talk, film screening and walking tour. Details to be announced by Bluecoat.

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