



### [Museum of Liverpool](#)

Reviewed by [Denis Joe](#) July 2011

“For me, architecture is more about creating spaces and environments that accommodate the people working and living in them. All through the process it is important for us as well as the client to have an environment that is inspiring and designed with the human being in full focus. I believe that architecture creates behaviour”

**[Kim Herforth Nielsen, Founder and Principal of 3XN]**

It seems everybody wants to play at being Big Brother these days. If it's not governments trying to change our behaviour it's architects. Admittedly it is hard to imagine how a building, no matter how aesthetically pleasing or how impressive it is, can actually change our behaviour (though, I imagine that the structure of the Museum of Liverpool would prove a great temptation for skateboarders).

The long-awaited £72 million Museum of Liverpool opened its doors in mid July, though I wanted to avoid the formality of the opening day and visit when ordinary folk were visiting. I have to admit that I didn't hold out much hope for the museum and being greeted by five *Superlambananas*

at the entrance did nothing to allay my fears - these monstrosities were forced upon the City during the City of Culture year, having been placed on the ring road after Liverpoolians proved unimpressed. No doubt some philistine in the council saw a tourist attraction and so they were mass produced and painted different colours, but no amount of multicultural dressing up is going to hide the misanthropic message behind them.



Even though it was a warm day, I don't think that accounted for the fact that the Museum was packed, and I heard a lot more Liverpoolian accents than foreign or other regional accents. There are three levels to the museum and though the first floor exhibit has not been completed yet, the exhibits on the ground and second floor offer patrons a lot to think about.

The ground floor deals with the history of the City from the industrial age, through its 'gateway to the Atlantic' and Empire days, up to the end of World War 2 and is dominated by exhibitions of the Chinese community. Whilst the role of Chinese people cannot be underestimated it would

be wrong to see the Chinese community as integrated into Liverpool as a whole. The history of the Chinese people in the City is not a very happy one and whilst Britain were engaged in rescuing democracy from the Axis powers during the second world war, it's policemen, trade unions and council were, in 1942, denying parity of pay and conditions, sometimes violently, for Chinese Merchant seamen who faced the same dangers on the seas as white seamen (see Yvonne Foley's excellent history of [Liverpool's Chinese / Eurasian community](#)). However the exhibit as a whole is really impressive, and the layout is very much in keeping with how I remember museums in my childhood. Whilst there were the inevitable interactive exhibits the majority of the exhibits were behind glass cases, in order to be contemplated rather than 'felt'.

Whilst it could be said that the ground floor exhibition dealt with the history of Liverpool, the exhibition on the second floor deals with the myths of the city. Fortunately they have not overdone it on the Beatles and have given space to other groups and singers from the Merseybeat era. Singers like Billy Fury, who equalled the Beatles record of 24 pop chart hits in the 1960s, were given space and I was surprised to realise just how much the city contributed to pop music. There are also exhibits on Liverpool's other legacies, particularly in drama and poetry.

