

CELEBRATIONS to mark the centenary of the official opening of Cunard Line's former world headquarters in Liverpool have been launched today - by a flock of sheep!

After being awarded the City of Liverpool's highest civic award, and admitted to the Freedom Roll of Associations, Cunard took up its "right" to drive sheep through the city's streets.

Angus Struthers, Director, Cunard joined the Lord Mayor of Liverpool Cllr Tony Concepcion to mark the historic honour bestowed in Cunard's spiritual home by herding and driving a flock of sheep along Canada Boulevard in front of the Cunard Building.

Cunard commissioned work on the building in 1914 and it was completed in 1916 to become the headquarters of the most famous shipping line in the world for more than 50 years. On 2 July, Cunard's Queen Elizabeth returns to the River Mersey during a special British Isles Culinary Discovery Voyage and will salute the company's former home during a day of further celebrations culminating in a firework display over the river as the liner departs. Cunard's first transatlantic paddle-steamer Britannia regularly carried livestock on its crossings from Liverpool to Halifax, Nova Scotia, Boston and New York which started from the Mersey 176 years ago.

As centrepiece of the city's renowned Three Graces and UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Cunard Building took pride of place as the backdrop to Cunard's 175th anniversary gathering of the three largest liners in the fleet's history which took place in Liverpool last May.

The flagship Queen Mary 2 and her sisters Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth staged a spectacular "river dance" attracting more than 1.3m spectators to the banks of the river to witness the unique event. Millions more around the world watched a live broadcast beamed from Liverpool.

Angus Struthers, Cunard Director, says:

"Receiving this great honour from the city which will forever be Cunard's spiritual home, was a highlight of that incredible weekend of celebrations here last May. When Queen Elizabeth returns to the Mersey in July we know the ship and her guests and crew will once again be warmly welcomed by the City of Liverpool. On that occasion we will be here to mark the 100th birthday of the magnificent building which has played such an important part in the growth and development of Cunard. Together, Cunard, Liverpool - and our flock of sheep - are writing the next chapter in our unique maritime history "

Lord Mayor of Liverpool, Councillor Tony Concepcion, says:

"It's not often you see a flock of sheep herded down the Pier Head, but I'm more than happy to be part of the spectacle as we celebrate giving Cunard the highest honour the city can bestow. Cunard are part and parcel of this city's history and the relationship remains strong to this day - we just have to remember the stunning scenes last year as more than a million people gathered to see Three Queens sail majestically up the Mersey. Their salute to Liverpool will live long in the memories of those lucky enough to see it, and I'm extremely pleased that such a valued institution as Cunard have been given the Freedom honour."