

MARITIME ARCHIVES AND LIBRARY

INFORMATION SHEET 49

LIVERPOOL DOCK REGISTERS

Scope of the Collection

These records are a unique source for dock use in Liverpool, collected by successive Mersey port authorities from the 1820s through to the 1960s. Records for the Birkenhead Docks appear after amalgamation with Liverpool in the 1850s. There are a number of gaps, and also a number of unidentified volumes, but work is underway to resolve these discrepancies. In all, there are some 540 large volumes held as part of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board archive at the Maritime Archives & Library, Merseyside Maritime Museum. Since these volumes are stored in a reserve store, they are available strictly by appointment only.

Scope for Research

The registers are the only source for movement of vessels *inside* the dock system: arrivals and departures from the port may be traced more easily through Lloyd's Lists, the Customs Bills of Entry or even the local press, but there is no other record of the movement of vessels from one dock to another. The registers have the potential therefore to cast light on the pressures on, and efficiency of, the dock system. In addition, the registers have the only record of the draft of a vessel on arrival in dock, and sometimes contain details about the use of cranes and specialised equipment.

Disadvantages

The registers are not indexed. They are arranged in groups of docks (as an added complication, groupings change over time) and therefore a given volume may list arrivals in more than one dock: it is not always clear which dock is involved. Finding data on individual vessels, even within a single dock, is therefore, fraught with difficulty.

Some registers are for unloading or loading berths only, some cover both parts of the process, depending on the working patterns of particular docks. Tracing particular vessels through the system therefore suffers from a multiplication of the problems above.

Small samples offer useful illustrative examples, but any serious analysis of dock use will require a major computerisation project.