

MARITIME ARCHIVES AND LIBRARY**INFORMATION SHEET 53****MINUTE BOOKS IN THE
MERSEY DOCKS AND HARBOUR BOARD COLLECTIONS****Scope of the Collection**

The holdings at the Maritime Archives & Library, Merseyside Maritime Museum, of Minutes of the Dock Committee and its successors run unbroken from 1793. Before that date, the Minutes were incorporated with those of the Corporation and there is a separated transcript going back to 1699.

From 1846, there were standing committees dealing with specific aspects of the business of the port and these, too, have survived complete to varying dates around 1960-1965. At various times, special committees were appointed to investigate specific issues (often alleged overspending) and there are several volumes of their proceedings. There are also minutes from other bodies eventually subsumed into the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, such as the Herculaneum Dock Co., the Birkenhead Dock Co., and the Dock Audit Commissioners.

Advantages

These are the authentic legal records of the decisions of the Port Authority and its various committees. They are very extensive, but are well indexed and therefore not difficult to use. Earlier volumes are obviously handwritten, but normally in a good clear hand.

Disadvantages

Minutes are the record only of what took place in a meeting, and a lot of the real business of the port was done outside of meetings. At any given time, there was usually a ruling clique which, in effect, pre-empted the decisions 'made' in the meetings by making caucus decisions outside. Minutes can also be infuriatingly succinct, serving only to make it clear that there are underlying issues or tensions present without providing the means to discover them. Later in the 19th century, newspaper reports of meetings can be quite detailed and much more penetrative than the minutes. The *Liverpool Courier* is particularly useful in this respect.

Scope for Research

Little work has been done on the nature and 'bonding' of the caucus groups, which involves using the minutes to indicate their activities or, indeed, prove their existence, and then using other sources to investigate the linkages of the members involved. Trade interests have been investigated to an extent, but other links such as freemasonry, club membership, hobby interests, secondary occupations, kinship by marriage, etc., have not. There is no systematic analysis of the voting records of members.

