

**MARITIME ARCHIVES & LIBRARY****INFORMATION SHEET 64****LIVERPOOL AND EMIGRATION IN THE  
19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES**

Liverpool has played an important role as the port of departure for millions of people seeking new lives in the New World countries of USA, Canada and Australia. Passengers, some of whom were emigrants or indentured servants, were carried regularly to North America and the West Indies from about 1660 onwards. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century thousands of emigrants from the British Isles and mainland Europe left from Liverpool. The establishment of regular sailing packet lines from 1818 and the huge demand for North American timber and cotton as raw materials for British industry led to well established transatlantic links, and emigrants, along with British manufactured products provided a useful return cargo.

Such were the numbers of emigrants, that it has been estimated that between 1830 and 1930 over nine million emigrants sailed from Liverpool bound for a new life in the US, Canada and Australia. For much of this period Liverpool was, by far, the most important port of departure for emigrants from Europe because, as well as its established transatlantic links, Liverpool was well placed to receive the many emigrants from the countries of north western Europe, such as Scandinavians, Russians and Poles who crossed the North Sea to Hull by steamer and then travelled to Liverpool by train. Irish emigrants crossed to Liverpool by steamship, and the Irish potato famine of 1846-1847 further increased the demand for passage from Liverpool. By 1851 it had become the leading emigration port in Europe with 159,840 passengers sailing to North America, as opposed to the second port, Le Havre, with 31,859. In the same period a large number of emigrants departed from Liverpool to join the gold rush in Australia, but this traffic, together with emigrants to New Zealand, which began to grow in the 1860s, was shared with other UK ports of Southampton, London and Plymouth.

Liverpool's share of the emigrant trade began to decline in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as emigrants increasingly came from the countries of southern and eastern Europe. Although some still passed through Liverpool, more sailed from the nearer German and Italian ports, and also from Southampton.

The restrictions on immigration imposed by the USA in 1926 and the two World Wars further diminished Liverpool's role. However, small numbers of emigrants continued to sail from Liverpool until the end of Cunard's and Canadian Pacific's Liverpool passenger services in 1967 and 1971 respectively.

**Awaiting Departure**

Emigrants were not allowed on board their ships until the day before, or the actual day of sailing, so this meant that most emigrants usually spent between one and ten days waiting for their ship in a Liverpool lodging house. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century emigrants passing through Liverpool were liable to harassment and fraud by local confidence tricksters, known as 'runners'. Runners frequently snatched the emigrants' luggage and would only return it if the emigrant paid a large fee. In the late 1840s and 1850s, lodging houses were often inhospitable, dirty and overcrowded. In 1851 the Liverpool Port Authority gave serious

consideration to building a special emigrant depot close to the Irish steamer terminal at Clarence Dock, with accommodation for 4,000 people at a time. The depot was never built, but one was opened for Australian emigrants at Birkenhead in 1852.

### **The Voyage**

Until the early 1860s most emigrants left Liverpool on a sailing ship. The voyage to the US and Canada took about thirty-five days and to Australia ten to seventeen weeks. Most emigrants travelled in the cheapest accommodation, known as the steerage. This was similar to a dormitory with bunks down the sides and tables in the centre. It was frequently overcrowded with poor ventilation. Emigrating in a sailing ship could be unpleasant, particularly during a storm. Seasickness was a particular problem on the stormy North Atlantic westbound voyage. Diseases such as cholera and typhus frequently reached epidemic proportion as infection spread through the confined decks. Scores of emigrants died on this account. Conditions on emigrant ships were covered by a series of Passenger Acts which attempted to lay down minimum standards of accommodation, rations and sanitation. The Board of Emigration Commissioners were established in 1840 to oversee emigration, particularly by arranging assisted passengers, often on their own specially chartered vessels.

From the 1860s the situation began to improve as steam started to replace sail on the transatlantic route and the voyage time was reduced to between seven and ten days. Most early steamship lines, including Cunard, refused to carry emigrants until the 1860s, with the exception of Inman Line, but as competition increased between the lines (and there were Cunard, White Star, Allan, Inman, Guion and National Lines all sailing from Liverpool for America at this time) emigrants were actively recruited through passenger agents in the UK and Europe. The steamship companies looked after the emigrants during their stay in Liverpool, with their representatives meeting the emigrants on their arrival in Liverpool. The emigrants were taken to lodging houses, which were frequently owned by the steamship companies, but delays still occurred and there continued to be complaints about treatment in Liverpool even in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Competition between the steamship companies also helped to improve conditions on board ship for the emigrants, when from about 1900 third-class cabins began to replace the steerage accommodation.

### **Records of Passengers**

Unfortunately, the records of this mass movement of Europeans are scattered or have completely disappeared. Much can be found at their port of arrival where they became new citizens and were not in transit. Official lists of passengers to the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, are generally to be found in the appropriate archives in the receiving country (see Information Sheets, Nos. 12 and 13). No official lists of passengers exist in any local repositories in the UK prior to 1889 apart from a few, rare examples. However, the National Archives (PRO), Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU, holds Board of Trade passenger lists of vessels travelling inwards to and outwards from British ports, including Liverpool, from the 1890s onwards (see Information Sheet, No. 31). These records are also online, inward from 1878 to 1960 at [www.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=1518](http://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=1518) and outward from 1890 to 1960 at [www.ancestorsonboard.com](http://www.ancestorsonboard.com).

Emigrants were not required to have 'exit passes' and 'application forms', as no permission, passport or application form was necessary to emigrate from Great Britain or Ireland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Only when financial assistance, from or via the government, was required, did forms of application have to be completed. There were many assisted emigrants to Australia and New Zealand in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, also to Canada, especially in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. There were a number of private emigration schemes to the US, but none had government backing since they did not contribute to British interests in what later became the Empire, and later still, the Commonwealth. Records of these schemes do not seem to have survived in the National Archives, except for the New Zealand Company for 1839-1850.



## **Posters**

The Guion Line or the Liverpool and Great Western Shipping Co., was established in 1866 by Stephen Guion, part-owner of the New York-Liverpool old Black Star Line of sailing packets and manager of Cunard's emigrant business (1862-1866). Guion Line ships carried many emigrants across the Atlantic until it was wound up in 1894.

The Allan Line or Montreal Ocean Steamship Co., was founded by Hugh Allan in 1854 to provide a regular steamship service from Liverpool to Canada. This company also attracted a large proportion of emigrant traffic due to its direct sailings from Glasgow and calls at Irish ports.

Guion Line poster (framed), c.1890.

Allan Line poster, 1911.

DX/596

c.1890 - 1911

2 Items

## **Passage Narratives**

Diary of an anonymous emigrant on a voyage from Liverpool to Australia on the *Morning Light* (W. & R. Wright, Liverpool) departing 8 July 1856.

DX/908

J.T. Deighton, probably from Stretford, near Manchester, compiled a beautifully written journal of his sailing ship voyage from Liverpool to Melbourne, Australia, on board the *Fred Warren*, 1867.

DX/651

William Culshaw Greenhalgh left Liverpool in 1853 aboard the *Marco Polo* (James Baines & Co.) bound for Sydney. In his voyage diary, which he sent to his relatives in Bolton, he gives vivid descriptions of shipboard incidents. A full transcript is available in: STAMMERS, M.K. *The Passage Makers, The History of the Black Ball Line of Australian Packets*. Brighton, 1978.

DX/1676

John Hedges (1828-1920), a builder from Hampstead, London, and his wife and two young sons, Walter and Basil, were government assisted emigrants. In his diary, in the form of a letter to his mother, he described conditions during their stay at the Birkenhead Emigrant Depot and their voyage on the *Admiral Lyons* to Sydney, New South Wales. There is much detail regarding health, hygiene, quality of provisions and hard work in Australia. His younger son Basil died in Sydney Harbour.

DX/243

## **Short Bibliography**

### **General**

GARRETT, R. *The Search for Prosperity*. London: Wayland, London, 1973.

HOERDER, D. & KNAUF, D. *Fame, Fortune & Sweet Liberty*, ed. Temmen. Bremen, 1992.

READ, J.G. & REES, P. *The Leaving of Liverpool* (document pack). Liverpool: National Museums Liverpool, 1986.

## **Transatlantic Emigration**

- COLEMAN, T. *Passage to America*. London: Penguin, 1972.
- ERICKSON, C. *Invisible Immigrants*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1972.
- GUILLET, E.C. *The Great Migration, 1770-1860*. Canada: University of Toronto, 1963.
- JONES, M.A. *Destination America*. London: Thames T.V., London, 1976.
- MADDOCKS, M. *The Atlantic Crossing*. USA: Time-Life, Alexandria, Va., USA, 1981.
- TEPPER, M. *American Passenger Arrival Records*. USA: Genealogical Publishing Company, Baltimore, USA, 1988.

## **Australian and New Zealand Emigration**

- CHARLWOOD, D. *The Long Farewell*. London: Allen, Lane, 1981.
- HAWKINGS, D.T. *Bound for Australia*. Chichester: Phillimore & Co., 1987.
- STAMMERS, M.K. *The Passage Makers*. Brighton: Tereido Press, 1978.
- WOOLCOCK, H.R. *Rights of Passage*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1986.
- KITSON, J. *Great Emigrations (2) The British to the Antipodes*. London: Gentry Books, 1972.
- VINE HALL, N.J. *Tracing your Family History in Australia*. Australia: Rigby Publishers, New South Wales, Australia, 1985.
- PESCOD, Keith. *Good Food, Bright Fires & Civility: British Emigrant Depots of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*. Australia: Australian Scholarly Publishing, Victoria, Australia, 2001.

## **Southern Africa**

- CAFFREY, K. *Great Emigrations (3) The British to Southern Africa*. Gentry Books, 1973.
- SPENCER, S.O. *British Settlers in Natal - a Biographical Register, 1824-1857*. Natal: University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1987.

See other emigration information sheets Nos 10, 12, and 13 for other websites relating to child, Australian, Canadian and USA emigration.