

# Dockside Dwellings: The provision of housing by the Liverpool Dock Authorities during the 19<sup>th</sup> century

**Rachel Mulhearn**

*Dans les années 1800, Liverpool devint le port d'exportation principal de la Grande-Bretagne, et le deuxième, après Londres, sur le plan du volume des importations. Une main-d'oeuvre importante travaillait à ses nombreuses opérations. Cet article porte sur les logements qui lui étaient fournis par les autorités portuaires de Liverpool. Que les sociétés fournissent des logements aux travailleurs urbains était inhabituel, mais à partir de 1819, le port adopta cette politique pour maximiser l'efficacité de ses opérations. Qui avait droit à ces logements et à quel prix? Les questions sociales corollaires comprennent la création d'une dépendance aux logements ainsi que d'une complaisance face au travail. Il s'agissait de toute évidence d'un avantage très substantiel pour l'employeur puisqu'il poursuivit cette politique pendant plus d'un siècle.*

The port of Liverpool needs little introduction. During the nineteenth century it rose to become a leading world port, both in terms of trade activity and port development.<sup>1</sup> Behind every successful port is a complex system of operational activity that ensures its efficiency. This labyrinthine activity begins with the piloting of vessels into port, their docking and their unloading. Then, the management of goods, their transport and their warehousing. The reverse procedure subsequently needs managing. And during the nineteenth century this involved many ships, with many different requirements across a dock system that eventually spanned nearly seven miles. To give an indication of Liverpool's importance as a port, during the second half of the nineteenth century, it was the United Kingdom's leading exporting port and its second largest importing port, behind London.<sup>2</sup>

It follows that a vast number of people were involved in keeping this organism in existence. These included dockers, tally clerks, customs officials, warehouse managers, stevedores, porters, carters, and many more. They also included the people who are the

<sup>1</sup> A. Jarvis, *Liverpool Central Docks*, (Stroud, 1991) and *The Liverpool Dock Engineers*, (Stroud, 1996) provide a thorough insight into the development of the Port of Liverpool.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Stammers, *Liverpool. The port and its ships*, (Stroud, 1991).

subject of this study, namely, harbour-masters, pier-masters, dock-masters and dock gate-men. This is not an account of the work of these individuals, although this requires some examination. This article is about the provision of company housing by the Liverpool Dock Authorities, a policy that impacted on the employees mentioned above.

By the time of the 1833 Factory Commission Report 19 per cent of company owners in England provided housing for their workers. Whether prompted by necessity or philanthropy, throughout England company owners built premises in which to house their workforces. The provision of company housing throughout the nineteenth century came to be a typical feature of the Victorian era. In studies<sup>3</sup> devoted to the provision of employee housing, three main reasons for such company policies emerge. First, the necessity to locate a workforce near remote working sites, such as shipyards, coalpits, factories and railways. For railway companies, the provision of housing for workers became commonplace.<sup>4</sup> As well as these schemes resulting in the emergence of railway towns such as Crewe and Swindon, they also overcame the problem of workers finding accommodation in remote areas. Cottages were provided for employees such as plate-layers, and often their wives would act as gatekeepers as part of the conditions of residency.<sup>5</sup> An additional advantage for companies was the increased security of their property from theft and damage.

Second, to introduce a house as part of a job increased the likelihood of compliance amongst workers. Provision of a home as part of a job contract went a long way in ensuring loyalty amongst those workers who were at the receiving end of such policy. Workers were more likely to submit to working conditions and less likely to become involved in industrial dispute if they were dependent on employers for their homes. Third, genuine philanthropic motives are evident in Victorian housing schemes such as Saltaire near Bradford and Rowntree Village in York. Better standards of living were believed to lead to improved social behaviour.<sup>6</sup>

It was unusual for urban-based industry to engage in policies of housing provision, quite simply because the workforce was usually close by. The town of Liverpool supplied an abundant workforce. The majority of workers at the Liverpool Docks, including dockers and other manual labourers, were employed casually. They lived within the dock communities, close to their place of work. This also applied to many employees of the Dock Committee. It was not, therefore, the remoteness of port activities that led the Dock Committee to provide housing for employees. It was neither through conscience nor

<sup>3</sup> Anonymous, *The Land We Live In*, (London, 1845); J. Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, (London, 1986); J. Burnett (Ed.), *Useful Toil. Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820s to the 1920s*, (London, 1974); M.J. Daunt, *House & Home in the Victorian City. Working Class Housing 1850-1914*, (London, 1983); D. Englander, *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain 1838-1918*, (Oxford, 1983); J. Hole, *The Homes of the Working Classes*, (London, 1866); R. Rodger, *Housing in Urban Britain 1780-1914*, (Basingstoke, 1989); D. Rubenstein, *Victorian Homes*, (Newton Abbot, 1974); J. Tarn, *Five Per cent Philanthropy*, (Cambridge, 1973).

<sup>4</sup> P.W. Kingsford, *Victorian Railwaymen - The Emergence and Growth of Railway Labour 1830-1870*, (London, 1970), 121-122.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> M.J. Daunt, 180-181. Daunt summarizes employers' involvement in the provision of housing as being motivated by "traditional survival," "pragmatic necessity" and/or "self-conscious reform."

compulsion that the Liverpool Dock Committee, later the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board (MDHB), made residences available for employees for over a period of one hundred and sixty years. The motivating factor was to ensure the efficient working of the docks and minimize any risk that might threaten the management of one of the most successful dock systems in the world.

From 1819 the Liverpool Dock Committee pursued a policy of housing certain employees within the dock estate. In April of that year a bill was passed through Parliament, its main purpose being to allow for further expansion of the Liverpool dock system. However, a minor clause of the Act gave the Trustees of the Liverpool Dock Committee authority to provide houses for harbour-masters, dock-masters and assistant staff on the dock estate. It is misleading to suggest that it was members of the Harbour-master's Department for whom housing was exclusively provided. This was not the case. Employees within the Engineer's, Observatory, Warehousing and Marine Surveyor's departments were also accommodated. The Harbour-master's Department simply provides an example with which to illustrate company policy.

Thus, throughout the nineteenth century, a period that witnessed the massive growth of the Liverpool dock system, it was dock-masters and pier-masters for whom housing was consistently provided. Most of the work undertaken by these officials was normally executed within routine working hours. However, it was those unplanned events that occurred out of normal working hours that presented problems for the dock authorities. By living within the docks, especially as these became greater in size, on-site staff could ensure the smooth running of the estate at all times. The security of the docks was of particular concern, especially the threat of fire. Strict bylaws preventing the lighting of fires on board vessels had been introduced, but frequent contravention of these posed ongoing dangers within the dock environment.<sup>7</sup> There was also concern over the number of accidents within the dock estate, especially at night. The unusual measure of providing a residence for the dock gate-man at Harrington Dock, a particularly isolated site, was taken for this very reason in 1845.<sup>8</sup>

The construction of housing within the dock estate mirrored its development. The dock authorities adhered to a consistent policy of accommodating necessary staff at each new dock. The first purpose-built dock-master's house, with office attached, was at Princes Dock, opened in 1821. As a condition of his appointment, dock master John Richard Davis had to live "constantly" at the house, paying £25 annual rent and all taxes.<sup>9</sup> By 1841 the Dock Committee agreed that all dock-masters should be provided with houses. Provision of housing continued, and, as a solution for those dock-masters without company housing, an annual rent allowance was allocated. As the dock system expanded, so too the number of individuals required to operate it. By the 1850s systematic planning was underway to provide all dock-masters and related staff at the new North Docks with residences, as well

<sup>7</sup> R. Mulhearn, "Police and Pilferers at the Port of Liverpool, 1800-1850," *International Journal of Maritime History*, XI, No. 1 (1999), 149-161.

<sup>8</sup> National Museums Liverpool Maritime Archives & Library (NML MAL), MDHB MP 1/9/360 30 October 1845.

<sup>9</sup> NML MAL, MDHB MP 1/2/219 22 June 1821.

as the extension of housing at the established docks to the south.

As discussed, initial housing centred on provision for dock-masters. Based within the Harbour-masters Department, their job was partly of a supervisory nature, managing the pier-masters and dock gate-men. An essential aspect of their duties, however, required their presence on site at particular times over a twenty-four hour period. They were responsible for ensuring the safe passage of vessels into the dock, and were therefore always present at tide times. Dock-masters were also responsible for ensuring that the bylaws of the docks were adhered to, and were responsible for the maintenance of the quaysides and dock gates. As early as 1805, the necessity of having the dock-masters on hand was apparent to the Dock Committee who instructed that these men were to "attend office at the dock in daytime two hours at Spring tides and at least one hour at neap tides before the gates are opened and remain on duty one hour at least after the gates are shut. In cases of emergency (sic) or when circumstances render it necessary, (the dock-masters) must remain as long as business requires."<sup>10</sup> A sub-committee of 1841 that examined the working of the docks concluded that housing for dock-masters should be provided "as the importance of having the dock-master always upon the spot and near their work is too evident to need remark."<sup>11</sup>

As the dock system expanded, the position of assistant dock-master became more established within the staffing hierarchy. These men, in turn, were provided with residences. Again, Princes Dock set a precedent, with a house and office built at the north west end of the dock. In order to provide daily operational assistance for dock-masters, the post of pier-master was also introduced. Pier-masters looked after the movement of shipping at the river entrance, directing tugs and the boatmen who crewed them<sup>12</sup> In 1839 there was no requirement for Pier-masters to live near the docks, but by the 1850s it was typical for them to live in housing provided by the dock authorities.

By the end of the century it was typical for head gate-men and canal entrance keepers in the employ of the MDHB also to receive houses as part of their jobs. Those who were not provided with accommodation had their wages supplemented by three shillings per week. This increase in rent allowance followed an official complaint on the part of those head gate-men who did not receive residences, indicating the demand for company housing.<sup>13</sup> The MDHB claimed that the rent allowance was never intended to be a substitute for a house, but the head gate-men certainly perceived the situation as a serious anomaly in the system. The main grievance was caused as a result of the increase in responsibilities of the head gate-men, especially at night when both the dock-master and pier-master could be absent attending to other business. By this time, only twenty one of the forty one head gate-men employed were provided with a house.

Although a dock gate-man at Harrington Dock had resided in buildings owned by the Dock Committee since 1845,<sup>14</sup> it was not until 1881 that residences were constructed

<sup>10</sup> NMLMAL, MDHB, DCM 1/1/136 15 April 1805.

<sup>11</sup> NMLMAL, MDHB, DCM 1/7/324-5 18 February 1841

<sup>12</sup> Alan Johnson, *Working the Tides*, (Liverpool, 1988), 7.

<sup>13</sup> NMLMALMDHB WUP 124/1.

<sup>14</sup> NMLMAL, MDHB, DCM 1/9/360 30 October 1845.

with the sole purpose of housing gate-men. This followed ongoing discussion that began twenty years earlier. The advantages for the Board in accommodating the gate-men were clear enough. The combination of their presence on site and the ability to call on them promptly, especially in the case of fire, was undoubtedly beneficial to the dock authorities. The root of the discussion lay in the cost of providing housing for the gate-men and their families.

The *Liverpool Courier* newspaper used the discussions about provision of housing for the dock gate-man to highlight the general problem of inadequate accommodation. "The men who look after the dock gates of Liverpool have very onerous and responsible duties to perform ... Their domestic arrangements, however, are of the most unsatisfactory character. They want to live near their work, but no decent or even habitable houses are within convenient distance of the docks. The consequence is that the men are compelled to live two or three miles off."<sup>15</sup>

The gate-men were equally vociferous in promoting their interests. Although there was nothing explicitly stated in the duties of the dock gate-men requiring them to reside near the docks, pressure was applied to the MDHB to extend their housing policy to include them. A letter received by the MDHB in 1871, written on behalf of the dock gate-men, requested remuneration towards house rent.<sup>16</sup> Implicit in these discussions and correspondence was the desire of the dock gate-men to receive conditions of employment comparable to those of their colleagues in the Harbour-masters Department.

Despite plans being drawn up in 1859 for dwelling houses at Sandon Graving Docks, the decision to proceed with work was deferred, the Board facing difficulties in identifying appropriate sites to address the accommodation needs of both single and family men. Prompted by the work programme of the new North Docks, a number of dwelling houses for a selection of head gate-men were built on the eastern passage leading from Canada Basin to Langton Dock. Concurrent to this work was the alteration of premises at Carining Pierhead for use by gate-men there. In June 1882, three head gate-men, two pier-masters, one dock-master, and a sub-foreman from the Engineer's Department moved into the new housing at the North Docks. In 1891 blocks of apartments were built on the north quay of Brunswick Dock for dock gate-men and other dock officials.<sup>17</sup>

It is within the discussion of the Board on this matter that the only hint of social control can be discerned in their housing policy, exposing contemporary attitudes towards English social class. The "diminution of the temptation"<sup>18</sup> of visiting the numerous public houses on their routes to and from work was perceived as one of the primary benefits of housing the gate-men within the docks.

The harbour-masters had always held an important position, although moves to provide them with on site housing were not addressed with as much attention as for the dock-masters. The harbour-masters were responsible for the general superintendence of the docks,

<sup>15</sup> *Liverpool Courier* 3\ August 1877.

<sup>16</sup> NMLMAL, MDHB WUP 124/1.

<sup>17</sup> N. Ritchie-Noakes *Liverpool's Historic Waterfront*, (London, 1984), 45.

<sup>18</sup> NMLMAL, MDHB WUP 133/1.

quays and basins, their offices being open for business from 8.30 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, with the exception of Sundays. There was no requirement in the rules and regulations for the holder of this post to reside near the docks, or in a residence approved by the Committee, as was the case with the dock-masters. In 1839 the dock-master's house at Princes Dock was altered in order to create a dwelling for the North harbour-master. By 1846 John Askew, the harbour-master of the South Division was living in a house on the east side of Queens Dock with his family.

The main motivation on the part of the Liverpool Dock Committee in providing residences for selected employees was to ensure the smooth running of the docks and thus protect their own interests. Housing was primarily provided for those officers who were responsible for the daily working of the docks. An employee was usually granted the house on the condition that it be vacated within seven days of notice, if the Dock Committee so required. This seemed to rarely happen in practice, and the Dock Committee appeared lenient, even at times generous, in its dealing with these employees. Officials at the level of pier-master and above were rarely dismissed, but, on the occasions that their behaviour was called into question enough to require action, they tended to be relocated to a less important post that could involve losing their house. In 1847 Thomas Chamley, the master of Georges Dock, was moved to Kings Dock. In the process, he was obliged to give up residency of his house to the new master. The post at Kings Dock at this time did not include a residence.

Thomas Herbert was one employee who might have been expected to receive a house provided by the Dock Committee. He joined the service of the Dock Committee in 1837 as master of the lightship. Over the next ten years he moved post four times, all to jobs as dock-master. At no time over this period, however, did he receive a house, even when Master of Albert Dock. This situation was more typical of the early period of housing provision. By the end of the century, the majority of dock-masters were housed by the MDHB. During the same period, an employee might well have enjoyed continuous residence in dock housing. Thomas Stirzaker is one such example. He started his career as a dock gate-man in 1834. From 1841, when he was appointed 3<sup>rd</sup> keeper at the Rock Lighthouse, he received accommodation as part of his job. Obviously while he was in the post of lighthouse keeper, his residence at his place of work was essential. However, as master of Clarence Pier and subsequently Master of Clarence Dock from 1850, he also received a house. The allocation of houses does not, therefore, seem necessarily related either to rank, or to any particular dock. It might have been expected that such a prestigious dock as Albert Dock would have been opened with dock-masters' residences already built. Houses were provided for members of staff within the Warehouse Department there, but it was not until the early 1850s that dock-masters' houses were constructed. Similarly, it seems unusual that a pier-master would have a house rather than the dock-master. The reality of the situation was that houses were made available where possible to whichever staff happened to be employed at that particular dock. For Thomas Stirzaker, the dock committee's policy of housing provision perhaps offered him a standard of housing he might not have otherwise achieved.

Provision of housing by employers typically raised concerns over such issues as security of tenure, unreasonable work levels, low wages, difficulties of changing jobs and concern of older employees' loss of housing. The residents of the dock housing were subject

to a number of conditions. Although there is evidence of dissatisfaction with wage levels, and increase of duties, these grievances were not necessarily directly related to the policy of providing staff housing.

Within the dock committee, there was a high level of job mobility that impacted on the patterns of residency within dock housing. However, residential mobility was a general social characteristic in Liverpool, certainly during the latter part of the nineteenth century,<sup>19</sup> and there is no evidence to suggest that occupiers were subject to greater inconvenience because of the Dock Committee's policy.

Those dock-masters who were provided with a house were required to live in it. Those for whom houses were not provided had to live within a certain distance of the dock for which they were responsible. In 1827 an allowance of £40 per annum was granted to those dock-masters not provided with a house. The potential insecurity of tied tenure, in the case of the Liverpool dock employees, was far outweighed by the advantages of being provided with a home. As previously discussed, the demand for dock housing amongst employees was high.

Despite this, the tenure did hold very real disadvantages. The dock authorities received regular requests from the destitute widows of dock company officials, for financial assistance. Their requests were usually met sympathetically. However, this did little to compensate losing their home, especially if they had dependent children. Mary Farrell was allowed a grant from the Charitable Fund after her husband, the pier-master at No.4 Princes Dock, was killed accidentally while on duty. No additional compensation seems to have been made, and she certainly would have been obliged to move from the house provided for her husband.<sup>20</sup>

However, many officials who reached retirement, although they were required to vacate their houses, left with a generous settlement, certainly enough to move to another house. John Askew resigned as South Harbour-master in 1847 due to ill health. After his twenty-seven years of service, he received a retirement allowance of £240 per annum and a gratuity of £300. Soon afterwards, the dock-master of Albert and Salthouse Dock resigned on the same grounds, and was granted an annual allowance of £200.

For James Martin, probably the only dock gate-man to reside in a house belonging to his employer as early as 1846, there was real financial benefit. Martin lived in the property rent-free. His fellow dock gate-man employed at Harrington Dock, William Thomason, received neither house nor rent allowance. Thomason was probably paying something in the region of two shillings per week for a home, 10.5 per cent of his weekly pay.

This policy of housing provision was not exclusive to the Liverpool dock authorities. The East & West India Dock Company in London began to provide housing for employees during the 1840s. By 1850, forty-eight families had been housed by the company, ensuring

<sup>19</sup> For a study of residential mobility in Liverpool see R. Lawton & C. Pooley, "David Brindley's Liverpool: An Aspect of Urban Society in the 1880s," *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire & Cheshire*, Vol 125, (1974), 149-168.

<sup>20</sup> NML MAL, MDHB UWUP M89.

an available workforce accommodated in relative comfort.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, across the river from Liverpool, in Birkenhead, a purpose built accommodation block was completed in 1845 to house dock workers. Contemporary reports applauded this pioneering venture. "They are so totally unlike anything of the kind to which we are accustomed, that a standard of comparison is not easily suggested ... On approaching them ... they appear more like houses for the upper classes of society; and we feel puzzled how to associate them with the requirements and limited wants of a working population."<sup>22</sup>

This project by the Birkenhead Dock Company was designed to attract labourers to the area, and retain them by offering accommodation at low rents. The situation at Ellesmere Port in Cheshire was perhaps more akin to that at Liverpool. As the Liverpool dock authorities felt it essential to house dock-masters at their place of work, by the end of the eighteenth century, houses were provided at Ellesmere Port for the lock-keeper and tonnage clerk alongside the route of the canal there. Later, the Ellesmere Canal Company also provided housing for other officials and dock workers as the town evolved.<sup>23</sup>

The relationship of housing and wages became a particularly pertinent issue for workers. For the investment on the part of the company to be returned, rent charges were usually introduced. This was particularly true as companies, the Liverpool Dock Committee included, moved away from renting property or adapting existing property to make available to workers, to building new property with the sole purpose of housing their staff. In the early days of the railways, railway arches, old houses and stables were converted into staff housing. Eventually of course, more systematic planning and investment resulted in the nascence of the railway towns. Unlike the housing at the Liverpool Dock, for railway workers the category of rent-free housing diminished as the century advanced. The reverse occurred at Liverpool. More typical was either the payment of rent by the Board, or an adjustment in salary or wages in order to take this cost into account. In 1833, the salary of Hugh McBride, the Master of Clarence Dock, was increased to £240 per annum, including house rent. McBride was not provided with a house, but his salary was previously £160 per annum, with a £40 per annum allowance for house rent.<sup>24</sup> In 1834, William Ashbridge was appointed Master of Brunswick Half Tide Dock, and was granted the £40 per annum house rent allowance in addition to his salary. The provision of a house came to be perceived as an integral part of an officer's overall remuneration, and allowances came to be expected by those individuals in a similar post who did not receive accommodation.

In 1841, salaries of the dock-masters were fixed, and these salaries took into account the provision of housing. Salaries and housing depended on the importance of the dock, assessed by the amount of tonnage that passed through it. In other words, those docks which were most valuable to the Dock Committee had more invested in them see the following tabic.

<sup>21</sup> Information drawn from research undertaken by Professor Sarah Palmer, Greenwich Maritime Institute, London.

<sup>22</sup> Anonymous, *The Land We Live In*, 104.

<sup>23</sup> P.J. Aspinall, *Ellesmere Port: The Making of an Industrial Borough*, (Ellesmere Port, 1982).

<sup>24</sup> N M L M A L , MDH BMP 1/4/697 5 February 1833



*Proposed Salaries of Liverpool Dock-masters as of 18 March 1841*

Dock	Proposed Salary £	Housing Provision
Princes	300	with house
Georges	250	with house
Salthouse	180	with house
Kings	250	with house
Queens	300	with house
Brunswick	250	with house
Clarence & Trafalgar	250	with house
Clarence Half-Tide	150	rent allowance in lieu of house
Waterloo & Victoria	250	with house
Canning	150	with house
Union & Coburg	150	rent allowance in lieu of house

Source: NMLMAL, MDHB, DCM 1/7/346-7 18 March 1841.

By 1866, the MDHB was paying out an aggregate sum of £618 per annum to officials for house rent, in lieu of accommodation. The bulk of this, £450 a year, was received by twenty-six members of the Harbour-masters department. Seventeen of these also had their rates and taxes paid by the Board. At the same time sixty-three officials occupied houses owned by the Board. Only two of these occupants paid their own rates and taxes.

An important aspect of these allowances was the payment of property-related taxes and provision of fuel and other basic facilities. Although early in the nineteenth century, the Liverpool Dock Committee did, on occasion, charge employees rent for tenancy of their houses, by the end of the century, all houses were rent-free. The MDHB recognized that housing staff at the docks was an investment, not through the application of rent, but through protecting their property and ensuring the smooth running of the dock system. To the employee, this rent-free housing was a considerable boost to their financial status, as was the provision of fuel.

David Brindley's diary of the 1880s<sup>25</sup> offers a useful parallel of a man in a similar social sector to a dock gate-man. His wages of 21 shillings a week in 1883 were similar to that of a dock gate-man, but his promotion in 1888 would have put his wages more on a level

<sup>25</sup> R. Lawton & C. Pooley, 149-168.

with a head gateman. Brindley moved twelve times within an eight year period, during the 1880s. The houses he rented were typical working class terraced properties. In 1887 he moved into a newly-built house and paid 5s 6d. per week. The rents paid over this eight year period worked out at between 10-15 per cent of his income.

On reading contemporary accounts of the Liverpool docks, it may be imagined that the families living in dock housing enjoyed a particularly pleasant environment to reside in. Gore's trade directory of 1839 describes Princes Dock as particularly appealing. "Along the west side a splendid parade appears, from which the most striking views of the river, shipping and opposite coast of Cheshire, are obtained." But despite this apparently idyllic setting in which employees living at Princes Dock enjoyed, in reality the docks were primarily a working environment, characterized by noise and pollution. This was not an ideal location for a family home.

The buildings, especially those situated nearer the river, inevitably fell victim to poor weather. The dock authorities applied an assiduous maintenance programme to its property. While the construction programme of the early 1840s was underway, involving the building of seven houses for dock-masters, repairs and improvements to existing property was not neglected. Pipes were laid to provide water and gas directly into existing houses. The pavement adjoining the house occupied by the Master of Clarence Dock was macadamised in order "to deaden the great noise made by carts of which complaint has been made."<sup>26</sup> A few years later, in 1847, iron railings were erected outside the houses at the same dock, in order "to protect them from nuisances of which complaint has been made."<sup>27</sup> Continual improvements were made, with back boilers being installed in selected residences in November 1852 and railings, porches and additional fittings provided at the houses on the quays of the North Docks in 1853.

The nature of these requests indicates the testing environment in which families were living. However, running water and a direct gas supply signified great improvements in living conditions at a time when the town of Liverpool was notorious for its poor quality of housing. Whilst the town of Liverpool suffered some of the worst housing in the country, and was a focal point of housing reform, the development of dock housing was exemplary. The houses built in the 1840s by the Liverpool Dock Committee bore more resemblance in accommodation and amenity, although not in architecture, to the terraced properties which became the worker's home in the later part of the century. Houses on the docks during the earlier part of the nineteenth century were comparable to those observed by Samuel Bamford in the 1840s, described as "the residence of the worthy working man."<sup>28</sup> These houses, built for weavers and metalworkers, had amenities such as "handsome fire grates, ovens and boilers."<sup>29</sup> Many of the Liverpool dock houses were solid, spacious family homes with basic amenities such as piped gas and water.

What the inhabitants of the Liverpool dock houses perhaps lacked, which the model

NML MAL, MDHB, DCM 1/8/24 7 July 1842.

NML MALJvIMM, MDHB, DCM 1/10/478 28 October 1847.

"Samuel Bamford Walks in Lancashire (1844)" in Rubenstein, 32-3.

*Ibid.*

villages of Lever, Salt and Ackroyd offered, was the feeling of being integral to an immediate community. These model villages usually incorporated chapels, churches, schools and shops, creating a microcosm of the larger community. The houses on the landward side at Liverpool were close to the rest of the dockland community, and would have been absorbed into the immediate built environment. However, those situated near the river, while not being too far in distance, remained isolated from the town. It is difficult to ascertain to what extent this feeling of isolation actually existed.

Despite these less favourable aspects of the houses, the residences at the Liverpool Docks evolved into established family homes by the mid-nineteenth century, and officials enjoyed comfortable lifestyles. Edward Horsfall, Master of Princes Dock in 1851 lived at No. 1 Princes Dock with his wife and daughter. His neighbour, pier-master John Curry, lived with his wife, Elizabeth, and children, Jane and William. Some of the residences accommodated extended families, as did that of dock-master Henry Rea. He lived at Waterloo Pierhead with his wife, three children, sister-in-law and nephew. Henry Rea, as well as dock-masters Thomas Stirzaker and Thomas King, both of whom lived at Clarence Dock, also employed live-in servants. Henry Rea, as a former Master Mariner, may have aspired to such social standing, but Stirzaker who started his career as a ship's mate, and joined the dock committee as a dock gate-man, perhaps never had such expectations.<sup>30</sup>

The house in which Captain George Stewart occupied as dock-master of Waterloo Dock at the very early part of the twentieth century was described as a "big beautiful house, with very large rooms and furnished with large furniture."<sup>31</sup> During the same period, the acting dock-master living at Albert Parade maintained "a very comfortable standard of living." The family employed a live-in maid and hired a washerwoman every Monday.<sup>32</sup>

One of the difficulties which the Board faced in providing houses for its employees was the need to accommodate both single and family men, and the latter situation was often a reason why officials were not able to benefit from the Board's housing program. The Board did, however, attempt to provide adequate family homes whenever possible and the houses provided by the Liverpool Dock Committee appeared very substantial, especially when compared to other company housing. In the early days of Goole, for instance, accommodation provided for port workers was little above slum quality, quite often being converted workmen's huts.<sup>33</sup> The Dock Committee in Liverpool did spend comparatively large amounts of money on dock houses. In Ellesmere Port in 1832 four houses were built for senior officials amounting to £1000 in total. During the same period the Liverpool Dock Committee spent £1,105 on one house for the senior harbour-master. Between 1840 and 1857 seventeen houses were constructed, others were adapted and altered, and all were subject to an ongoing maintenance programme. Rent was rarely charged, and, increasingly,

<sup>30</sup> Liverpool Record Office, 1851 Census returns 2177.2.4,2179.3.6.8, 2181.1.5,2180.3.5,2187.1.9, 2188.2.2.

<sup>31</sup> NML Museum of Liverpool Life, Letter from Mrs D.P. Stewart to Merseyside County Museums, 10 May 1984. Captain Stewart was a relative of Mrs Stewart.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, Letter from Mrs Ellen Parry to Merseyside County Museums 22 May 1983. The dock-master was the father of Mrs Ellen Parry.

<sup>33</sup> J.D. Porteous, *The Company Town of Goole*, (Hull, 1969), 30.

the occupants of these houses were exempt from paying fuel and water costs and taxes. No direct financial return was therefore gained by the Liverpool dock authorities. Their housing provision was purely motivated by the desire to improve and ensure the efficient working of the Liverpool dock system.

The Liverpool dock authorities considered it essential to have certain members of staff available at all times. However, at no one time did all the dock-masters employed by the dock authorities reside in houses within the dock estate. This situation promotes a question as to how necessary this policy really was. With the town of Liverpool so close by, this supervision might have been as easily achieved. Dock gate-men, and dock police officers were on site during those times when their superiors were not. The housing provided, however, lasted well into the twentieth century. The decision to phase out the policy of housing provision was taken in the early 1960s. With technological advances in dock operations, manning levels dropped at the Liverpool docks, including those of the Harbour-master's Department. By 1994 the Harbour-master's Department employed the equivalent of three dock-masters and two head gate-men.

As one of the largest dock systems in the world in the nineteenth century, the provision of housing at the docks for harbour-masters, dock-masters, pier-masters, dock-gate-men, engineer's staff, lighthouse and telegraph house keepers, was symptomatic of the drive for success amongst those controlling the management of the port of Liverpool. Dock officials were housed at the expense of the dock authorities, under favourable terms and conditions. The dock authorities did not aspire to recapture the expenditure laid out in the construction of these premises through the charging of rent. For one hundred and sixty years, the Liverpool dock authorities housed sections of their workforce. There was evidently a very real benefit to the dock authorities in order to pursue this policy for so long.