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Liverpool: The docks

[A History of the County of Lancaster: Volume 4](#). Originally published by Victoria County History, London, 1911.

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Footnotes

DOCKS

Under the first Dock Act, 1708, [\(fn. 1\)](#) the mayor, aldermen, bailiffs, and Common Council became the trustees of the proposed dock, and were empowered to construct the dock and to levy dues. They were not incorporated, but used the corporation seal; managing the first and successive docks through committees, which were as completely under their control as any other council committees. By an Act of 1811, [\(fn. 2\)](#) however, they were separately incorporated and given a seal of their own; the finances of the docks were separately administered from those of the corporation, by a statutory committee of twenty-one members appointed by the trustees (i.e. the Town Council), but the Town Council still claimed and exercised the right of voting sums from the dock funds, and of overriding the actions of the committee. The control of the docks by a close corporation, which was in no way representative of the ratepayers or of those who used the docks, led to much discontent and discussion, and in the end produced a new Act, that of 1825, [\(fn. 3\)](#) whereby, though the trust remained unaltered, the committee was changed by the inclusion of eight members elected by dock ratepayers. The council still retained a majority, thirteen of the committee being councillors, while the chairman was also selected from among the members of the committee by the council. The Act also provided that the proceedings of the dock committee could only be overridden by a majority of two-

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thirds of the council, and only at the meeting of the council immediately following that of the committee. By an Act of 1851 (fn. 4) the number of the committee was raised to twenty-four, half of whom were to be dock ratepayers, while the chairman was to be elected by the committee itself. But the power of revision still remained with the Town Council. Outside of both council and committee there had been from the first an independent body of auditors, numbering nine under the Act of 1708, (fn. 5) and appointed in equal groups by the corporation, the justices of the county of Lancaster, and the justices of the county of Chester. An Act of 1734 (fn. 6) raised the number to twelve, four nominated by the council, eight by the dock ratepayers. By an Act of 1841 (fn. 7) the mayor, the chairman of the dock committee, and the senior borough magistrate, were appointed revisers of rates.

Even with these safeguards, however, and even though the council was now a representative elected body, dissatisfaction was felt with this system of administration, which identified the interests of the dock estate with those of the municipality. This expressed itself in controversies on the rating of the dock estate, and in the agitation for the Act of 1851, which was originally an attempt to alter the constitution of the dock committee so as to leave the council only the mere shadow of control, but which was amended to the effect already described. It also lowered the voting franchise for dock ratepayers. But the strongest opposition came from the merchants of Manchester and the railway companies, which resented the traditional charges for town dues; this went so far that a society was founded in Manchester called 'The Society to secure the right appropriation of the Liverpool Town Dues.' In 1857 they promoted a Bill, based upon the recommendations of the Commissioners of the Board of Trade, who had in 1853 reported in favour of the appointment of independent bodies of conservators for the regulation of public harbours, and of the transference to them of all dues levied by municipal corporations. The Town Council fought the Bill with all its power, especially objecting to the confiscation of its traditional town dues; but eventually withdrew its opposition in consideration of a payment of £1,500,000 for the loss of the town dues, and of certain other modifications. By the Act thus passed (fn. 8) the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board was constituted, and took over the control both of the Liverpool and of the Birkenhead Docks, and the right of collecting not only dock dues but also the ancient traditional town dues. The board has continued to collect the town dues, despite the fact that opposition to these dues was one of the principal causes of its establishment. The board consists of twenty-eight members, four of whom are nominated by the Mersey Conservancy Commissioners (the First Lord of the Admiralty, the President of the Board of Trade, and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster); while the other twenty-four are elected by all persons paying rates on ships or goods to the amount of not less than £10 per annum. Members of the board must be resident within 10 miles of the boundary of the borough or port of Liverpool, and must have paid rates on ships or goods to the amount of not less than £25 per annum. The office of Chairman of the Dock Board is commonly regarded as the most honourable at the disposal of Liverpool citizens.

The history of the actual dock estate may be conveniently divided into three periods, (fn. 9) corresponding to the periods in the history of its governing body:—

I. Between 1709 and 1825, when the docks were under the direct control of the corporation, the following wet docks were opened:—

1. Old Dock, opened 31 August 1715; closed 31 August 1826.
2. Salthouse Dock, opened 1753; altered 1842; enlarged 1855.
3. George's Dock, opened 1771; enlarged 1825; closed 1900.
4. King's Dock, opened 1788; closed 1906, the name being preserved for two new branches of the Wapping Dock.
5. Queen's Dock, opened 1796; enlarged 1816; deepened and half-tide dock added 1856, and closed 1905; enlarged 1901; branches added 1901, 1905; altered 1906.
6. Union Dock, opened 1816; thrown into Coburg Dock 1858.
7. Prince's Dock, opened 1821; half-tide dock added 1868.

The total area of wet docks in 1825 amounted to 46 acres 3,179 sq. yds.; the lineal quayage to a little over 2 miles. The dock dues paid in the same year amounted to £130,911. It may be noted that the first London Dock was not opened until 1802.

II. Between 1825 and 1857, when the docks were under the control of the Dock Committee, the Old Dock was closed (1826), and the following new docks were opened:—

1. Canning Dock, opened 1829; previously a basin known as the Dry Dock, opened 1753; enlarged 1842.
2. Clarence Docks, &c., opened 1830; enlarged 1853.
3. Brunswick Docks, opened 1832; enlarged 1848, 1858, 1889; branch dock added 1878; altered 1900.
4. Waterloo Dock, opened 1834; reconstructed as E. and W. Waterloo Docks, 1868.
5. Victoria Dock, opened 1836; altered 1848.
6. Trafalgar Dock, opened 1836.
7. Coburg Dock, opened 1840; altered from Brunswick Basin; enlarged 1858; altered 1900.
8. Toxteth Dock, opened 1842; closed to make way for new works, 1884.
9. Canning Half-tide Dock, opened 1844.

10. Harrington Dock (bought), opened 1844; closed to make way for new works 1879.
11. Albert Dock, opened 1845.
12. Salisbury Dock, opened 1848.
13. Collingwood Dock, opened 1848.
14. Stanley Dock, opened 1848; partly filled in 1897.
15. Nelson Dock, opened 1848.
16. Bramley Moore Dock, opened 1848.
17. Wellington Docks, opened 1850; half-tide dock closed 1901.
18. Sandon Dock, opened 1851; half-tide dock added 1901; altered 1906.
19. Manchester Dock (bought), opened 1851.
20. Huskisson Dock, opened 1852; branch docks added 1861, 1872, 1902; altered 1896, 1897; enlarged 1900.
21. Wapping Dock and Basin, opened 1855; two King's Dock branches added 1906.

The water area in 1857 amounted to 192 acres 129 sq. yds., or an increase of over 82 acres in twenty-five years; the lineal quayage was about 15 miles; and the river-wall, when the Dock Board came into existence, already extended for just over 5 miles. At the same time the Dock Committee and the Corporation had acquired the Birkenhead Docks, which do not fall within the purview of this work. It is clear that the old Dock Committee did not lack energy. For the ten years preceding the establishment of the Dock Board the dock dues averaged nearly £250,000. It was on the security of these that the capital for the construction of the docks was raised; and no profits were used for purposes other than the service of the port.

III. During the fifty years of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board more time and money have been spent on the enlargement and reconstruction of the existing system than on the creation of new docks. The new docks of this period are:—

1. Canada Dock, opened 1858; enlarged 1896; altered 1903; branches opened 1896, 1903, 1906.
2. Brocklebank Dock, opened 1862; known until 1879 as Canada Half-tide Dock; enlarged 1871.
3. Herculaneum Dock, opened 1866; enlarged and branch dock added 1881.



Langton Docks, opened 1879.

5. Alexandra Dock (and three branches), opened 1880.
6. Harrington Dock, opened 1883. (fn. 10)
7. Hornby Dock (and branch), opened 1884.
8. Toxteth Dock, opened 1888. (fn. 10)
9. Union Dock, opened 1889. (fn. 10)

During the last thirty years, however, the board has been mainly occupied in reconstructing large sections of the dock system, so as to accord with that remarkable change in the size of vessels resorting to the port which has brought it about that while the tonnage of the port has since 1880 increased 66 per cent. the number of vessels has in the same period actually declined from 10,000 to little over 6,000. (fn. 11) The new type of gigantic steamships demanded a wholesale reconstruction of the docks to which they resorted. The docks have accordingly been grouped in systems, each adapted to the needs of different kinds of trade, and each equipped with its appropriate warehouses, sheds, cranes, graving-docks, &c. The southern system, including the Herculaneum, Toxteth, and Harrington docks, was vastly enlarged between 1881 and 1888; the Canada-Huskisson system, at the north end, was radically reconstructed between 1890 and 1906, with the result that the largest American liners now use it in place of the Alexandra-Hornby system, which at the time of its construction represented the last word in dock engineering; the BrunswickWapping system, in the south-central region, which includes some of the oldest of the docks, was completely rearranged, enlarged, and deepened so as to admit the biggest vessels, between 1900 and 1906. The accommodation, however, being still inadequate, a large new system of docks is now (1908) under construction at the extreme north end of the line.

In 1900 the George's Dock, one of the oldest of the series, which lay between the city and the pierhead, was closed by arrangement between the Dock Board and the Corporation. Part of its site was utilized for the magnificent domed building in which the offices of the Dock Board are now housed; two of the main shoreward thoroughfares were continued across the site of the dock direct to the pier-head; and the main entrance to the city has thus been materially improved and dignified.

The total water area of the docks (excluding those on the Cheshire side of the river) now (1908) amounts to 418 acres 320 yds., and the lineal quayage to 26 miles 1,083 yds. The continuous dock-wall fronts the river for a distance of 7¼ miles.

In addition to the docks controlled by the Dock Board, the London and North-Western Railway has three docks at Garston, now within the limits of the city, which have a water area of 14 acres 2,494 yds.

As the period of the Dock Board's administration has been the period of the rapid development in the size of ships, which is in no port more marked than in Liverpool, a large part of the Board's work has consisted in maintaining a clear channel in the river. The task of dredging the bar which impedes the entrance to the river was seriously begun about 1890. Carried on by dredgers of unusual magnitude and power, it has cost not far short of half a million of money during the last fifteen years, but the result has been to provide a clear deep-water passage, lacking which Liverpool might have found it impossible to maintain her control over ocean trade under the new conditions. No account can here be given of the other works of the Board, of its vast warehouses, of its appliances for the disembarkation of cargo, or of the immense floating stage, 2,478 ft. long, whereby the landing of passengers at all times is rendered possible despite the very great rise and fall of the tides in the Mersey.

Footnotes

1 . 8 Anne, cap. 12. On the whole history of the administration of the docks, see the Town Clerk's Report on the Possibility and Expediency of obtaining representation of the Corporation on the Dock Board (1907).

2 . 51 Geo. III, cap. 43.

3 . 26 Geo. IV, cap. 43. For the defects of this system, see *Munic. Corp. Com. Rep. of Liv. Inquiry*, *passim*.

4 . 14 & 15 Vict. cap. 64.

5 . 8 Anne, cap. 12.

6 . 7 Geo. II, cap. 29.

7 . 4 & 5 Vict. cap. 30.

8 . 20 & 21 Vict. cap. 162.

9 . Figures taken from Memorandum Bk. of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, 1908. Smithers, *Liv.* 169 ff. and 452, describes the condition of the docks in 1824; Baines, *Liv.* App. describes them in 1852.

10 . These are names of old docks, given to new docks in the same region.

11 . See table of entrances and clearances, p. 37 above.

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