



OLD TOWN HALL, LIVERPOOL

THE HERDMAN DRAWINGS OF OLD LIVERPOOL

By Ronald Stewart-Brown, M.A., F.S.A.

Read 25th October 1911.

AS there is so much for you to see this evening¹ I do not propose to try to do more than give you a short account of how Liverpool comes to be possessed of a collection of topographical drawings such as I believe no other city in England possesses to-day. I shall not attempt to describe the collection, which will speak for itself when you inspect it.

Although drawings actually by his own hand form only a small portion of those in this library, it is to William Gawin Herdman that we owe the idea of the collection, which now consists of about 1200 drawings, 73 by W. G. Herdman himself, and 26 by W. Patrick Herdman, 20 by J. Innes Herdman, and 945 by William Herdman, three of his sons. This does not include the 141 drawings now in the Art Gallery.

William Gawin Herdman was the son of a Liverpool corn merchant, and was born on the 13th March 1805. He was a teacher of art in Liverpool, and for some years a member of the Liverpool Academy, from which, however, he broke away and

¹ This paper was read at the meeting of the Society held in the Reference Library, Liverpool, where an Exhibition of the Herdman drawings was arranged by the Chief Librarian, Mr. G. T. Shaw, and his staff.

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founded a rival society—the “Institute of Fine Arts.” This died an early death. The greater part of his life was devoted to the drawings of old Liverpool with which his name is usually associated. At an early age he commenced to sketch local views or objects of interest. Two sketches at Bidston are said to be his earliest. In one of his books he says that “He cherished a desire to place on record and preserve to posterity all he could collect that was valuable of the ancient appearance of his native town.” With that object he accumulated some hundreds of drawings of old buildings and places in Liverpool and the vicinity, and he expressed the hope that his collection would some time find a resting-place in one of the local institutions. Here is his own account of his efforts :¹—

Having a taste for architectural subjects, I began very early in life (about thirteen years of age) by sketching the old buildings of Liverpool, most of which—except the Castle—were at that time still in existence. I drew all the old remains, such as the Tower, the old Church. . . . I made drawings of these and the old houses and streets because there was nothing in the shape of art in the town for a young lad to draw or copy. By the time I got to about twenty years of age, I found I had made something like 300 drawings of relics of old Liverpool, many of which were passing away; but I had no idea of doing anything with them at the time. A few years afterwards, on becoming acquainted with Egerton Smith, he told me I should publish these views, and that in time they would become very valuable as historical works of the early architecture of the town. . . .

In 1843 he brought out the first series of his *Pictorial Relics of Ancient Liverpool*, published by Graves in London and by Holden in Liverpool, and printed by Marples in Liverpool. This quarto volume, issued in parts, contained forty-nine plates lithographed by Herdman himself and produced by Day & Haghe.

In 1857 a second series, also in parts, was pub-

¹ *Liverpool Mercury*, May 24, 1882.

lished by the author, being printed by Henry Greenwood in Liverpool. It contains forty-eight plates, most of them drawn on stone by Herdman himself, a few being done by his sons, James Herdman and William Herdman. One or two of the plates were produced by Messrs. Maclure, Macdonald & Macgregor in Liverpool, but the majority were by the printer Greenwood. Both volumes of this series are now getting scarce.

Two more volumes, issued in 1878, will be referred to later.

To continue Herdman's own notes:—

I have done more for Liverpool in its antiquities than any other town in England, even London, has received. It must be remembered, in issuing these four books, I made all the drawings myself, collected the historical portion, and wrote the letterpress also, so that the whole is my work. When about twenty-six years of age I was made a member of the Liverpool Academy, and when I became secretary of that society I was the first to lower the aristocratic shilling for admission to twopence in the evening, so that the working classes for the first time in the history of art had an opportunity of improving their taste. I was the founder of the shilling Art Unions, which gave the public the power of obtaining good works of art which they never could otherwise acquire. . . . I turned my attention earnestly to perspective, and having studied Malton and other writers on the science, I was astonished at the wretched state it was in.¹ . . . Sir David Brewster examined my discoveries in perspective, and stated them to be true publicly at a meeting of scientific men at the Duke of Portland's.

I have published in all ten works² on different subjects. Of my unpublished works, my large volume of poems in MS. and print³ is substantially bound and in the Free Library at

¹ The result of this was his *Treatise on the Curvilinear Perspective of Nature*. London: John Weale & Co; Liverpool: Deighton and Laughton. 1853.

² These are the five volumes already mentioned, and the following: *Folio of Studies*. T. Physick, Manchester, 1838. *Hymns and Sacred Melodies*, &c. London: George Emery & Co.; Liverpool: James Smith. 4to, N.D. *Views of Fleetwood-on-Wyre*. Fo. T. Physick, Manchester, N.D. [circa 1852]. *Thoughts on Speculative Cosmology and the Principles of Art*. Printed by A. & D. Russell, Liverpool, 1869. *A New System of Natural Perspective*, 1851.

³ 4to [1878].

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Liverpool, and my *History and Practice of the Art of Skating*, with 100 figures drawn by myself and ready for the engraver—all of which I could perform on the ice—is yet in MS., as the offers of the publishers were so small.

He also refers to "My invention of those unique and accurate machines, four of which I have put up in Stanley Park, which show exactly, to the scratch of a pin, any object even if sixty or seventy miles off, and also name the object to the spectator using the machine. These machines cost me a considerable sum, as they were three times destroyed by roughs at the north end of the town, merely to get possession of the brasses on which the names of objects were engraven."¹

Herdman resided nearly all his life in Everton: in earlier years in Lansdowne Place; and subsequently at West Vale, St. Domingo Vale. He died on the 29th March 1882, aged seventy-seven, and was buried at Anfield. There is a portrait of him by Mr. H. E. Kidson in the Permanent Collection at the Art Gallery, and a large photograph which was lent to the Exhibition of 1907 by Mr. Holbrook Gaskell. There is also a photograph in *Liverpool Obituary Notices*, vol. ii. p. 136.

I am not going to say much about Herdman's work from an artistic point of view.² He exhibited at the Royal Academy on several occasions. Sir Francis Chantrey is stated to have purchased several of his earlier works, and a View of Settle was bought by the Duke of Cambridge. He did some excellent work in Wales, Chester, Lichfield, and elsewhere, now chiefly in private hands away from Liverpool. But in this paper I only aim at paying a tribute to his whole-hearted, lifelong, and never-flagging de-

¹ See Appendix.

² There are accounts of him in *The Liverpool School of Painters* (Marillier) and in J. C. Morley's *Biographical Notes on Liverpool Artists*.

votion to the architectural and pictorial history of Liverpool.

Herdman had a family of eleven sons and five daughters; some of his sons and grandsons endeavoured to follow in his footsteps, but with unequal success. The Free Library collection includes many hundreds of drawings by William Herdman the son; but his work is hardly as good as that of W. Patrick Herdman, some of whose sketches are beautifully executed and painted. J. Innes Herdman and Stanley Herdman were poor and feeble draughtsmen.

One of W. G. Herdman's patrons was the late Joseph Mayer, and by the acquisition in 1887 of the Mayer papers a number of his drawings came to the Free Library. In a letter¹ of February 1877, Herdman writes to Mayer: "I hardly know what to say about the drawings. Probably a dozen for ten guineas would be about an average according to the time required." There is also another interesting letter, written from Conway in July 1873:—

I am sorry to occupy a moment of your valuable time, but would you tell me, was the Pennington you mention in your valuable pamphlet on the Potteries any relation to the artist Pennington who lived in Everton Terrace, who was a member of the Liverpool Academy about forty years ago? I ask this because you mention Everton Terrace in connection with the name. I shall have what is considered a very fine and elaborate view of the Herculaneum Potteries in my forthcoming work. I do not think anything could be finer in its perfection of detail.

Whilst staying here I have taken views of the house Gibson was born in—the other side of the Woods of Benanth—and also the house he lived in by the church in Conway. You will probably have these, otherwise I would make you two monographs [monochromes], one of each, for two guineas each; they are the best for photography. If you were to call on Mr. Brown of Vandyke and Brown you would see some splendid monographs of mine; ask him to show you the Castle, or Hope Street, or the North Shore.

¹ Among the Mayer papers at the Public Library, Liverpool.

But the chief patron of the Herdmans was Alderman William Bennett, who with his brother Joseph successfully conducted the well-known iron-mongery business in St. John's Lane, afterwards in Victoria Street. For thirty-six years William Bennett was a member of the Town Council. He was a man of great ability, though his opposition to the Rivington and Vyrnwy Water Schemes appears short-sighted now. In later life he retired to Heysham Tower, near Morecambe, where he died on September 18, 1885, from the effects of a carriage accident. Mr. Bennett was keenly interested in Liverpool, and spent many hundreds of pounds in commissioning Herdman and his sons to draw the sketches you will see to-night. Nearly every street in Liverpool is represented, and all kinds of buildings, churches, houses, and shops, good, bad, and indifferent. The whole collection is now carefully catalogued,¹ and I refer you to it for details. Doubtless there are many sketches of what seem at present to be unimportant, ugly, and uninteresting places; but when we consider what a similar collection made two or three hundred years ago would now be worth to us as an illustration of the domestic architecture of the period, we cannot, in the interests of future generations, despise even a single one of them. The drawings were kept at Heysham Tower in scores of portfolios; and, besides Liverpool sketches in colour and sepia, included many Welsh, Irish, and other scenes.

In 1889 Messrs. Derome & Sons of Kendal were instructed to sell the Bennett Collection by auction, and considerable correspondence appeared in the Liverpool papers as to the advisability of purchasing for the Corporation. Upon the instructions of the Library, Museum, and Arts Committee, then headed by Sir James Picton, the Chief Libra-

In Liverpool Prints and Documents, except the Cheshire views.

rian (the late Peter Cowell) was instructed to go to Heysham. His report was as follows:—

January 24, 1889.—The Librarian begs to report that in accordance with the instructions of the Committee he visited Heysham Tower for the purpose of inspecting and reporting upon the collection of drawings of streets, buildings, &c., in Liverpool and its immediate neighbourhood, made by William Herdman for the late Mr. Bennett, a collection remarkable in extent and character and an illustration of great local interest and attachment on the part of the collector.

It numbers altogether nearly 1500, including those illustrating the Cheshire side of the Mersey, principally Tranmere, Birkenhead, Seacombe, and Wallasey. The drawings taken in Liverpool and its outskirts number about a thousand. They are of various sizes, but average 12 to 14 inches by 6 or 7 inches. They are executed in the artist's usual style, somewhat boldly but always effectively, and with great faithfulness as to architectural features and details.

According to a note on p. 27 of the Sale Catalogue, lots 256 to 272 may be offered together. These comprise 942 drawings. That this will be done is, I think, very improbable. . . . Many of the drawings in these suggested lots show considerable care and finish, but all are worthy of purchase, and would form a valuable and interesting addition to the local collection now in the Library. . . . What the suggested lots of drawings will sell for at auction is not easy to say; but judging from the prices we have been in the habit of paying for such original drawings it might be desirable to fix 7s. 6d. each as a not improbable price, though I am in hopes that they will sell for less.

The Librarian thinks the question of purchase of a large portion of these interesting Liverpool drawings well worthy of the Committee's consideration, as it is extremely improbable that such an opportunity for securing these or similar ones is likely to occur again.

At the next meeting Sir James Picton (Chairman) moved and Mr. John Davies seconded a resolution that the Chief Librarian be instructed to attend the sale and empowered to bid for the drawings to the extent of £300. After discussion the motion was withdrawn, but its supporters stuck to their guns. On January 31, 1889, the Chief Librarian reported that he had attended the sale. Nearly the whole, over 1000, were purchased by local book-

sellers, including all those recommended by the Librarian. The principal lot (256-272), 940 odd drawings, sold for £341, or 7s. 6d. each, the very price named in the earlier Report. "A further inspection of the drawings, which are all remarkably clean and executed in Mr. Herdman's best manner, has only served to impress the Librarian with their great local interest and importance; and he again recommends the Committee to endeavour to secure, before they are scattered, a large portion of them for the Binns Collection in this Library." The Chairman and Mr. Cowell were asked to see the purchasers and report what could be done, and the result of the renewed agitation was fortunately successful. At a meeting of the Town Council on February 13, 1889, Sir J. Picton moved and Alderman Samuelson seconded a resolution:—

That the valuable collection of drawings, principally by the late W. G. Herdman, 943 in number, illustrative of the history and architecture of Liverpool, collected by the late Alderman William Bennett, now offered to the Council, be purchased for the sum of £450 out of moneys raised by the Rate for 1889 laid under the Liverpool Library and Museum Act, 1852.

The Council divided: for, 32; against, 6; majority in favour, 26; and the results of the purchase are before you.

In 1905 there was another large sale of Herdman's drawings by order of G. W. Bennett of Oxtou, who had become possessed of a number at the previous sale. The sale took place by Messrs. Branch & Leete on 18th and 19th April 1905, and included upwards of 100 water-colour drawings of old Liverpool by William Herdman, the son, chiefly of Everton, Kirkdale, and Walton. I have no particulars of the purchasers. There have also been many other small lots put up for sale from time to time.

THE HOLBROOK GASKELL COLLECTION.

A most important collection of Herdman's drawings now belongs to the Walker Art Gallery, and the Curator has kindly arranged for you to see it here to-night. This consists of 22 frames, containing 141 sketches. The interest of these lies in the fact that they include most of the original drawings afterwards elaborated by the artist, and also a large number of sketches which have not been reproduced in any form. One of the most interesting frames contains nineteen drawings of carved wood and stone doorways to various houses in Hanover Street, Duke Street, and other one-time fashionable residential quarters. These are well worth the attention of architects of the present day. This collection was at one time on sale in the possession of V. S. Pennington & Co., of 63 Renshaw Street, Liverpool, who issued a small undated catalogue.¹ It was subsequently purchased *en bloc* by the late Holbrook Gaskell of Woolton Wood. After his death his executors presented the collection to the Walker Art Gallery in May 1909.

THE SEPIA COLLECTION.

About 1874 Messrs. Vandyke & Brown resolved to publish some further reproductions of Herdman's drawings by the autotype photographic process, and as water colour was not satisfactory for the purpose, they employed Herdman and his sons to make reproductions in sepia of as many of his drawings as could be obtained. These were exhibited in 1874 in the Exhibition Rooms, Old Post Office

¹ Small 4to, in Public Library, D. 4039.

Place, Liverpool, and a valuable catalogue¹ was compiled. The result was the production by Messrs. Brown, Barnes, & Bell of two fine quarto volumes containing 72 autotype plates, published by Walmsley and printed by Marples in Liverpool. The 85 sepia drawings were subsequently sold for £1000 to Mr. A. J. J. Bamford, a Liverpool provision merchant, afterwards of Llanrhaidr Hall, Denbigh, and were exhibited in the Walker Art Gallery in 1874.² Upon Mr. Bamford's death the drawings, which had been elaborately framed in the ornamental gold frames in which they now are, were offered for sale as one lot by Messrs. Whitehead and Son of Liverpool on March 6, 1896. There was some expectation they might be purchased for the Corporation, but the bidding was confined to three; Alderman Grindley offered £600, and the late Lorents B. Haddock £650. The reserve price seems, however, to have been £950; and the late H. E. Kidson, the art dealer, eventually purchased the drawings for £960 on behalf of Richard Manley Foster of Waterloo, a member of the firm of Bromilow & Foster, colliery proprietors, Ormskirk. Not long afterwards they were acquired by Mr. John Rankin, who in 1908 presented the entire set of sepia drawings to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, and they are displayed to great

¹ "Descriptive Catalogue and Guide to Messrs. Vandyke and Brown's Collection of Herdman's Pictorial Relics of Ancient Liverpool, compiled from Authentic Sources, with Notes Historical and Descriptive. Liverpool, 1874." Sm. fo. Price 6d. 117 views are described, with valuable notes on the old drawings used as a basis for the earlier ones.

² The sepia drawings, or some of the autotype reproductions, were also shown at the Liverpool Jubilee Exhibition, 1887; a catalogue and prospectus being issued by Sidney W. Wood, of 34 Moorfields, for an issue of 100 autotype drawings in 54 weekly parts, price 1s. each. Mr. Wood informed the writer that he did not carry out the projected series owing to lack of support.

advantage in the various rooms and corridors of the offices.¹

At the Historical Exhibition of Liverpool Antiquities in 1907 the Holbrook Gaskell collection, the sepia drawings, and a large selection of the Library collection, were exhibited together with forty-seven carefully chosen examples (in private ownership) of the best local work of W. G. Herdman.² Many of the latter were the property of the writer, but afterwards passed into the hands of Mr. John Rankin, who had already a large collection of local pictures. In 1908 Mr. Rankin generously presented many of his pictures of old Liverpool to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board and the Cotton Exchange, and, at the suggestion of the writer, a catalogue³ of Mr. Rankin's collection was prepared and printed in 1908. It is by Mr. S. W. May of the Public Library, and gives interesting notes upon 232 local pictures.

In the Exhibition of Liverpool Art held in 1908 in the Walker Art Gallery, W. G. Herdman was represented by several examples in oil and water colour, such as "The Market Place, Minchinhampton," "Interior, Lichfield Cathedral," "Old Long Millgate, Manchester, 1823," &c.⁴

In 1864 a volume of local sketches was issued by Wm. Herdman, the son, with the title, "Views in Modern Liverpool in chromo-lithography by James Orr Marples and the Artist, with an Introduction and Descriptive Letterpress by J. A. Picton, Esq., F.S.A., Liverpool. Printed and Published by

¹ See the catalogue referred to in note ³ below.

² For details see the catalogue of the Exhibition.

³ "Old Liverpool. Descriptive Catalogue of Original Water-Colour and Sepia Drawings by W. G. Herdman and others, Prints, Maps, &c., illustrative of the History and Topography of Liverpool. Forming the Collection of John Rankin, Esq., of Liverpool." Liverpool: Privately Printed, MCMVIII. 8vo, 58 pp.

⁴ See the Catalogue of the Exhibition.

David Marples, MDCCCLXIV." It is dedicated to Lord Stanley of Bickerstaffe, and contains thirty-seven plates, showing forty-two buildings. There is an interesting survey by Sir J. Picton of the architectural development of Liverpool. The plates, as is admitted in the Introduction, are not very satisfactory, being somewhat crude, and better results were hoped for if a second series should be issued. This was never done.

APPENDIX

MR. R. T. BAILEY, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. (Lond.), a member of the Society, kindly sends me the following notes on the instruments mentioned on p. 8:—

I find Stanley Park was opened on Saturday, May 14, 1870. In the *Liverpool Mercury* for Monday, May 16, 1870, on page 7, there is an account of the "Opening of Stanley Park," the last sentence of which (column 6) reads as follows: "An interesting description of the scenery and localities visible from Stanley Park, written from personal observations, by Mr. W. G. Herdman, of Everton, will be found in another column"; on page 6, column 4, there is an article entitled, "The Views from Stanley Park, by W. G. Herdman of Everton." This description is the same as the one which is still to be seen on the framed and varnished papers which are attached to the walls of the shelters on the terrace in Stanley Park.

The instruments for viewing the surrounding country were four in number, and three are still (1911) to be found at the south-eastern portion of the terrace; the fourth instrument, which gave the direction for viewing the Isle of Man, was removed about twenty years ago to the yard of the Park; this was done because the trees had grown around it, and the path was being altered; it stood on the south side of Mill Lane. The terrace follows the curve of the back gardens of the houses in Anfield Road; it commences at the entrance in Anfield Road (near Walton Lane) and ends at the junction of Arkles Lane with Anfield Road. The first portion of the terrace is on high ground, and here are the shelters built of stone, in which are the descriptions; in front of the most southern shelter is one of the instruments. On the other part of the terrace there are no shelters, and here are the other two instruments. Each forms a revolving rest for a telescope which can be directed towards certain named distant points. Each instrument is about $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet high, and consists of three main parts, *i.e.* (1) an iron spiral stem fixed to a base in the ground; (2) on the top of this is fixed a cylindrical piece of iron with a brass band running round it marked with the names of localities or points which may be seen, such as distant hills,

churches, &c.—above each name is a vertical indicator mark ; (3) on the top of the cylindrical iron is an iron block revolving round a pivot which runs down into the stem. In the top of this block is a hollow in which the telescope may be rested, and on the side under the hollow is an indicator mark. When, by revolving the block, this mark is brought into apposition with any of the indicator marks on the brass band below, the telescope points at the place there named. The views obtainable are to the north and the east, the south and west being obscured by the houses in Anfield Road. On a clear day it is said that, besides places in Lancashire, the mountains in Westmorland and Cumberland may be seen. I think, as W. G. Herdman wrote the account of the "Views from Stanley Park" from personal observations, that the instruments invented by him and mentioned by you in your paper are the instruments I have described. I see W. G. Herdman is given in Kelly's Post Office Directory for 1873 as living at 41 St. Domingo Vale, Everton ; as this is very near Stanley Park, he would have frequent opportunities for verifying his observations.