

Liverpool guides, 1795–1914

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The term ‘guide book’ in the nineteenth century was more likely to conjure up images of Rome, Florence or Paris as seen through the eyes of Carl Baedeker, than of Liverpool. Nonetheless, many guides to Liverpool were published in this era. In a survey published in 1865, Thomas Dawson listed four pages of ‘guides’ published between 1784 and 1850, and new guides continued to be published through to World War I.¹ Why did these guides appear when they did, and who was likely to read them? Liverpool at the end of the eighteenth century, when the first of the guides appeared, was emerging as the first port, outside of London, of Britain and its growing empire. Throughout the nineteenth century Liverpool continued to hold that pre-eminent position and ranked, after London, as the second city in the country. The appearance of the guides can be seen as a sign of growing civic pride, of the belief that Liverpool had its part to play in the destiny of the nation, or, to use the contemporary term, ‘the kingdom’.

The guides broadcast Liverpool’s importance, to the ‘kingdom’ and beyond. They listed its magnificent and growing line of docks, its new public buildings, churches, and monuments, its literary clubs and newsrooms, and the achievements of its eminent sons and daughters, all indications of its commercial pre-eminence and cultural prestige. As the urban historian Peter Borsay argues, ‘cultural prestige was no mere ornament. It possessed a real financial value which contributed significantly to the economic resurgence enjoyed by many towns’.² Although most of the early guides were

¹ T. Dawson, ‘The pamphlet literature of Liverpool; with a chronological catalogue of pamphlets published or printed in Liverpool 1710–1850, *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 17 (1865), pp. 73–138.

² Borsay, *The English urban renaissance: Culture and society in the provincial town 1660–1770* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 312–13.

small enough in size to slip into a gentleman's pocket, for the guides' market was the gentleman, resident or stranger, it is difficult to imagine their readers assiduously visiting all of the listed buildings, churches, docks, and parks and gardens, although such excursions were outlined. No doubt some visitors did look at the Town Hall, or later at St George's Hall and the Royal Liver Building, but the purpose of the guides was not primarily to provide itineraries for indefatigable travellers, but rather to proclaim Liverpool's importance nationally and further afield.

What image of the town/city did the guides project? What perceptions of the ideal city did the guides draw on, consciously/explicitly or subconsciously/implicitly? The guides were 'popular' works for a middle class readership. They were not political, economic, literary or philosophical tracts directed at a professional or academic audience but they did draw upon the philosophical and literary views of what constituted the 'ideal city' which were current at various times in the nineteenth century. Nineteenth century attitudes to growing urbanisation were both positive and negative. The guides almost exclusively emphasised the development of towns and cities as a positive factor in contributing to the 'good life'.

In 1795 Henry Wallace published *A general and descriptive history of Liverpool*, which, although Wallace saw himself as writing a definitive history of Liverpool, can lay claim to being one of the earliest guides to the town.³ He attempted to unravel the etymology of the name 'Liverpool', a task undertaken by many of the early guide writers who followed him. He was concerned also with the climate and geology of the area, and the importance of the River Mersey. Having laid these foundations Wallace anticipated the nineteenth-century advocates of the city by examining the size of the population, the 'dimension' of the town, the number of streets, the major public buildings, the churches, the places of 'amusement and recreation', the markets, the rise and progress of commerce in Liverpool, the magistracy, local government and internal policing, concluding with remarks on the surrounding countryside, 'the environs'. Wallace established a template or format which was largely followed by many of the early Liverpool guides.

Wallace's book, as well as being a history, was undoubtedly also a

³ Bibliographical details of each guide are in the appendix, and are not repeated in the footnotes.

guide, but the first to use that description specifically in connection with Liverpool was William Moss. Having produced a medical survey in the 1780s, Moss published in 1796 *The Liverpool guide*. He argued that there were good reasons for producing a guide to Liverpool. Liverpool was, apart from London, the first town in the kingdom in 'point of size and commercial importance'. As a result, he claimed, it had recently become the 'resort' of visitors 'for the purpose of commerce'. The growing wealth of the town, derived from its commercial activities had enabled it to make 'internal improvements'. These, along with the town's pleasant and salubrious situation, the convenience of sea bathing, its amusements, and the 'lively cheerful air which regularly pervades it have of late years made it also the resort of strangers for the purposes of health and entertainment'. All of this made a guide necessary.⁴

Moss provided information about inns and taverns, ferry boats and hackney coaches, but the core of his guide was a 'survey' of the town and the docks. The docks were central to Moss's sense of civic pride. They possessed 'magnitude, convenience and a harmony of parts unrivalled throughout the world'. Liverpool's wealth was based on its commerce. This, however, presented Moss with a moral dilemma for at the heart of Liverpool's commercial strength in the 1790s was 'the African trade', the slave trade. This major negative factor would be largely evaded by later writers of guides but Moss attempted, if not to justify the slave trade, at least to ameliorate any negative conclusions which might be drawn by critics. He accepted that from a moral point of view the slave trade could 'meet with no countenance'. However, from a political point of view 'everything favours it'. It was impossible, he argued, to reconcile these two 'while man retains his fallen state'. In other words, political and economic expediency justified the continuance of the slave trade. For Moss an extenuating factor in the continuance of the slave trade was that the African slave's relative position was much better than that of many people throughout the world, which was increased by the fact that his 'ignorance' made him 'unconscious' of his condition. This was a not unfamiliar argument but Moss's unease on the subject of the slave trade is evidence of the impact being made by the abolitionist movement in the 1790s.⁵

⁴ Moss, *The Liverpool guide*, pp. 1–2.

⁵ Moss, *The Liverpool guide*, pp. 69, 124–25, 128.

Moss's guide is also enlivened by personal and idiosyncratic comments. He was not averse to dropping into his paean of praise for Liverpool the occasional mildly critical comment, a course of action usually eschewed by later guide writers who wished to avoid providing even the smallest hostage to fortune. He criticised the tendency to 'ape' London place names, for example, Islington. Many of Liverpool's churches, he noted had clocks but none of them had a bell which could be heard at any distance, so there was no 'general monitor' of time, whereas in London St Paul's fulfilled this function. As a doctor he was concerned that insanity was 'a growing malady', the cause of which was the 'increasing dissipations and excesses of the age'. At a time when there was still insufficient safe drinking water, Moss was also concerned about the 'indifferent' quality of the local ale. As a result Liverpool had to import that 'necessary and wholesome beverage'.⁶

An emphasis on 'improvement' was a key feature of Liverpool's most popular guide, if we judge by the number of editions, in the first half of the nineteenth century. *The stranger in Liverpool* first appeared in 1807 and eventually went through twelve editions. Its Liverpool publisher Thomas Kaye claimed that the guide was sold also in Chester, Manchester, Warrington, Preston, Lancaster and Ulverston. His object was to publish as comprehensive a survey as possible within the limits imposed by its pocket-book size. Nothing of importance would be omitted and all the recent changes and improvements in the town would be described. It would be a 'companion for the stranger' and also a convenient work of reference for local inhabitants. Following the pattern established by Moss, the core of this guide was the description of Liverpool's public buildings, its churches, its places of amusement and, perhaps most importantly, its line of docks. By the time the first edition appeared Liverpool's docks had a history of almost a hundred years. Although the dock buildings had not yet achieved the splendour of the middle and late nineteenth century they were seen by the writers of the guides as the most compelling symbol of Liverpool's commercial wealth and of her claim to importance in 'the kingdom'. For *The stranger* further compelling evidence of Liverpool's importance, and of its commercial and cultural development, was the existence of a number of newsrooms. Ten years previously there had

⁶ Moss, *The Liverpool guide*, pp. 83, 93, 99, 117.

been none but now the Lyceum, Athenaeum, Union, Minerva, Commercial and Electra served the town's commercial and professional elite. Additionally there were five weekly Liverpool newspapers.⁷

The whole tone of *The stranger* was positive. There was no dwelling on negative features or wrestling with conscience over the morality of the slave trade. Liverpool had 'ensured the continuance of her prosperity by engaging in the African trade'. Liverpool was an excellent place in which to live and work. It had the advantages of a 'salubrious air and a mild temperature'. For *The stranger* there was no emphasis on the 'loveable' roguish peculiarities of the Liverpudlian, the favourite cliché of twentieth century writers on the city's inhabitants. Such an emphasis would have militated against the image of Liverpool it projected. So the general character and manners of Liverpool's inhabitants 'assume no striking characteristics to distinguish them from other towns'. It was to Liverpool's 'honour' that its peace had seldom been disturbed by the 'rage of religious bigotry', or by the 'effervescence of political enthusiasm'. Even in its numerous inn and taverns, or at least in those of 'respectable name', the stranger would find a civility and a degree of attention which in 'houses of this description are not in all places to be met with'.⁸

Less circumspect than *The stranger* and more willing to accept that there was further room for improvement in Liverpool was its main rival in the first three decades of the century, *The picture of Liverpool*, which went through five editions between 1805 and 1837. In the 1833 edition, the year of the Abolition of Slavery Act, it described the slave trade (abolished in the British Empire in 1807), as 'that most nefarious, though profitable trade in human thews and sinews, at the thought of which the heart sickens and the just excitement of every good man is excited'. *The picture* accepted that the profits from the slave trade had provided the basis for Liverpool's commercial greatness but argued that the town had since developed into 'the mart of a respectable and honourable system of merchandise'.⁹

⁷ *The stranger*, pp. 75–90, 128.

⁸ *The stranger*, pp. 18, 34, 39, 40, 122.

⁹ *The picture*, pp. 27, 29. For the profitability of the slave trade, see, for example, D. Richardson, 'Profits in the Liverpool slave trade: The accounts of William Davenport, 1757–1784', in Roger Anstey & P. E. H. Hair, eds, *Liverpool, the African slave trade and abolition* (Liverpool, 1989).

Liverpool had some splendid public buildings, claimed *The picture*, notably the Town Hall with its 'external grandeur' and 'interior commodiousness and splendour'. The Exchange was a 'magnificent structure' and there were many churches which had 'a high degree of classical elegance'. However, the Customs House was 'in every respect unworthy of the town'.¹⁰ But Liverpool did display many signs of progress. Her streets, shops and offices were lit by gas and there were few places in the same latitude, which had greater advantages 'with regard to the health of the inhabitants'. A disturbing feature in this respect, the growth of 'pauperism', which could not be laid simply at Liverpool's door as it was a national as well as a local problem. *The picture's* concern here was clearly the threat to Liverpool's middle classes and to its image of respectability and social progress. Unless pauperism was checked the class of the community 'immediately above those who are supported by eleemosynary aid' would quickly be reduced to the same condition. The major factor in the growth of pauperism in Liverpool was, argued *The picture*, the influx of the Irish poor into Liverpool. Using the arguments of the classical political economists of the period, it argued that the solution to Ireland's, and thus England and Liverpool's problems, was the introduction of a 'proper Poor Law system' into Ireland. The cost of this should be borne by Irish landlords and would be of benefit to the community generally.

Why should the Irish poor be left destitute of the necessary means of life, when their own country produced such abundance, and that merely to allow the rich absentee greater means for riot and extravagance?¹¹

The problem of the Irish poor was thus not Liverpool's but *The picture* had been prepared to confront it, unlike the majority of nineteenth century Liverpool guides in which there are very few references to Liverpool's Irish poor, except obliquely through references to Roman Catholics in Liverpool.¹²

¹⁰ *The picture*, pp. 58, 62, 105–58, 69.

¹¹ *The picture*, pp. 168, 51, 45, 46. For contemporary political economists and their views on Ireland and the Poor Law see Christine Kinealy, *This great calamity: The Irish famine 1845–1852* (Dublin, 1994).

¹² For a stimulating discussion of various aspects of the Irish experience see John Belchem, *Merseypride: Essays in Liverpool exceptionalism* (Liverpool, 2000), pp. 67–154.

The 1833 edition of *The picture* also included a brief history of the recently opened Liverpool and Manchester Railway. The coming of the railway, the great symbol of progress in the nineteenth century, added to Liverpool's lustre. *The picture* regarded the adoption of steam engines as a bold step but one which must ultimately bring great benefits to the community. In the wake of the railway would come other gains. There would, for example, be a 'vast decrease' in the acreage devoted to the production of oats for horse-feed. The land would instead be used to produce food 'suitable to the human species'.¹³

The possibilities of commercial profit from stressing the importance of the railway as a symbol of progress was quickly recognised. By 1838 an enterprising Liverpool publisher had commissioned a new guide, *Cornish's guide to Liverpool and Manchester with the traveller's companion on the railway*. The author, James Stonehouse, was later to become a prolific writer of Liverpool guides. As well as routine descriptions (there was a good deal of what would now be termed plagiarism among the writers of guides) of Liverpool and, to a lesser extent Manchester, the guide includes a list of the fares and stations on the Liverpool to Manchester railway. Stonehouse later explained that he wrote the book for Cornish & Co. in 1838 and that he was paid £12 for the manuscript. Before writing the book, he claims that he walked up and down the line three times, making notes. In 1843 because there had been so much growth and change in Liverpool he completely re-wrote the book and had to do so again in 1851, when the fifth edition appeared. By 1879 Stonehouse estimated that 240,000 copies, in twenty-four editions, of the work under various titles, had been sold.¹⁴ After the appearance of *Cornish's guide* all other guides included information about railway destinations and timetables.¹⁵

Stonehouse's claimed publication figures, even if they are slightly over-blown, indicate the growing popularity of Liverpool guides. From the 1840s, as a result of this popularity there was increasing competition among publishers. In 1842 Wareing & Webb of Castle

¹³ *The picture*, pp. 231ff.

¹⁴ In the copy of the 1838 edition in Liverpool Record Office there is a handwritten note of Stonehouse's, undated but probably from c. 1879.

¹⁵ See for example, Alexander Brown, *Smith's strangers' guide*: this guide, appearing four years after *Cornish's* included information on railway connections to London, via Birmingham, to Fleetwood, St Helens and Chester.

Street, Liverpool produced *The picturesque handbook to Liverpool*. The publisher claimed that this was a guide 'worthy of a great emporium'. As the copyright of *The stranger* had now passed into new hands, it was the publisher's intention to 'submit to the judgement of the people' a similar guide but in a new and more attractive format. The text had been completely revised, the suggested routes round the town re-modelled and this pocket guidebook was 'embellished' with a new map of Liverpool and with fifty illustrations. This was all necessary because Liverpool was one of the most remarkable examples of the influence of 'commercial speculation when pursued with steady vigour, prudence and resolution'.¹⁶ The emphasis on civic pride was even more pronounced than in earlier guides. *The picturesque handbook* trumpeted that scarcely a corner could be turned in Liverpool 'without opening to view one or more beautiful buildings devoted to some public purpose'. This guide also made great play with the names of eminent people born in, or associated with Liverpool.¹⁷ *The picturesque handbook* appeared in several editions in the 1840s and 1850s. In 1852 it appeared under the rather grander title of the *Royal picturesque handbook*, although there was little change in the content to justify its supposed regal status. The 'royal' in fact disappeared very quickly from the title and by 1854 the guide was simply *Handbook to Liverpool*.

Increasing competition in the 1840s, 1850s, 1860s and 1870s provided further evidence of the continuing popularity of Liverpool guidebooks. James Stonehouse's *Pictorial Liverpool* claimed to be a new and 'complete' handbook for residents, visitors and tourists and a guide to Liverpool's annals, commerce, shipping, institutions, public buildings, sights and excursions. However, despite the grandiose claims, *Pictorial Liverpool*, which appeared under a variety of titles over a period of thirty-five years, re-hashed the standard information available in earlier guides. Stonehouse also produced a spin-off from his guide, *The streets of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1869, 1870, 1879).¹⁸ Stonehouse worked for the town council as the Liverpool Markets manager. His hackwork as a writer of guides may have supplemented his income from his council post and

¹⁶ *Picturesque handbook*, p. 23.

¹⁷ *Picturesque handbook*, pp. 28, 31.

¹⁸ A reprint of the 1869 edition was published by Liverpool Libraries and Information Services, 2002.

enabled him to indulge in more scholarly and poetic activities. He wrote for the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, and two collections of his poetry survive.¹⁹

Recognition of Liverpool's importance, which was what the guides sought to project, can perhaps be seen in that guides published outside of Liverpool began to compete with local products. A notable interloper was *Black's guide*, first published in Edinburgh in 1865, which appeared in several editions until the end of the century. This was one of a series of national guides, cheaply produced with minimal revision from edition to edition. The 1886 edition did note the financial collapse of Compton House, Church Street, which had been described in the 1869 edition as the largest private shopping complex in Britain. By 1886 Lee's and the Bon Marché had replaced Compton House as the 'fashionable establishments for ladies' dresses'. Other information, however was not revised. In 1868 *Black's guide* titillated its readers with references to the 'love feasts' at Hope Hall, which it claimed had been exposed by the press some twenty-five years earlier. The 1886 edition still had these supposedly lurid events occurring twenty-five years previously.

Further outside competition came from Abel Heywood of Manchester, something of an entrepreneur in the publishing field.²⁰ In 1871 he published *Liverpool as it is*, while his namesake John Heywood of London published the *New penny pocket guide to Liverpool* in 1878. Abel Heywood's sixteen-page penny guide of routine information did however, in an introductory verse in the inside cover, encapsulate the message which all of these guides attempted to project, an image of Liverpool as a great commercial centre, important not only in Britain but also in the wider world.

So long as frugal industry prevails
And punctual honour guides her virtuous sons;
So long as innocence and modest worth
Enhance the native beauties of the fair;

¹⁹ See for example, his 'Historical notes respecting the township and village of Everton', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 4 (1851–52), pp. 66–78; *Tales, ballads and occasional poems* (Liverpool, 1867); *Flowers of many hues* (Liverpool, 1879); also manuscript collection, Liverpool Record Office, 942 STO.

²⁰ B. E. Maidment, 'The Manchester Common Reader—Abel Heywood's evidence and the early Victorian reading public', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 97 (2001).

So long shall Liverpolia's wealth increase,
 Her stately structures and extensive trade;
 Still in the bosom of her crowded port
 Receive the tribute of each foreign clime;
 To every realm unfurl her swelling sails
 And be the emporium of the Western World.²¹

Later guides such as Black's and Abel Heywood's carried advertising and by the 1870s the guidebook genre was so well-established that some local businesses began to produce their own guides to take advantage of what was clearly considered an important market. In the latter part of the nineteenth century the Adelphi claimed to be Liverpool's leading hotel. In 1872 it produced its own guide which was firmly directed at the American market. The main aim of *The Adelphi guide* was not to project the image of Liverpool but rather to enhance its own commercial opportunities. For business reasons an increasing number of Americans were travelling to Liverpool but *The Adelphi guide* felt that a word of warning was needed to these trans-Atlantic visitors, for their expectations of Liverpool might be a little unrealistic. The image of Liverpool had to be presented carefully. The tourist trying to familiarise himself with the town must be prepared for a good deal of work, agreeable work, but at times arduous. Liverpool, *The Adelphi guide* was at pains to explain (perhaps unlike other guidebooks), was not another London or Paris. It did not have in every street some feature of 'historic or literary interest' and neither were its public buildings redolent with 'memories of municipal struggle and municipal freedom'. However, the American visitors would be able to enjoy the consolations of the Adelphi itself, the largest hotel in Liverpool and beyond all question 'one of the best, most complete, and convenient hotels in the world'. The Adelphi could assure its American clients that they need have no anxiety that it would lack the luxurious facilities that they were accustomed to. Visitors from the United States were 'particularly liable to annoyances of this kind in England' but not in the Adelphi.²²

Department stores also wishing to exploit the possible market provided by visitors to Liverpool produced their own guidebooks. Lewis's, which saw itself as Liverpool's leading department store, was producing its own penny guide by the 1880s. *Lewis's handy guide*

²¹ *Liverpool as it is*, front cover.

²² *The Adelphi guide*, pp. 11, 19.

claimed it was supplying a ‘long felt need’. It argued that ‘many thousands’ were pouring into Liverpool. They wanted to see and to get to know as much as possible but their time was limited. Similarly the livelihoods of many depended on the ease and speed with which they could move from ‘street to street’. In addition to the routine list of public buildings and places, therefore, alphabetical street directories for Liverpool, Birkenhead and the Wirral were included. The guide, it was suggested, was another example of Lewis’s ‘special mode of advertising’, which offered something useful at a ‘trifling’ cost because Lewis’s always sold at fair prices and gave full value for money.²³

In 1908 when one of its rivals, Bon Marché, produced a nineteen-page illustrated guide, Lewis’s demonstrated its cosmopolitanism by publishing a multi-lingual guide, sections of which were in Spanish, Swedish and German as well as in English. The justification for this multi-lingual approach was that Liverpool’s cosmopolitanism was such that the visitor could come from any part of the world and yet still find someone in the city to greet him in his own tongue. Why Spanish, Swedish and German were chosen rather than any other languages, however, remained unexplained.²⁴

Lewis’s cosmopolitan awareness, no doubt driven, at least to some extent, by commercial perceptions and concerns, was also illustrated by the *Lewis’s guide* section on Liverpool’s small but well-established China town. The presence of the small Chinese community in Liverpool was something of a contentious issue. No other guide made any reference to the Chinese settlement or the local opposition to it. This omission was probably motivated by the general desire of the guides to avoid any references which might be damaging to the reputation of the city and to the image which they wished to foster. However, *Lewis’s guide*, somewhat surprisingly confronted the issue full on, arguing that the press had ‘worked up a small sensation’ in 1906 and had questioned the right to residence of the Chinese.²⁵

As a result of a motion by James Sexton, Independent Labour Party councillor and dockers’ leader, and Austin Harford, a leading member of the Irish Nationalist group on the city council, Liverpool City Council had set up a commission of enquiry. Sexton and Harford were concerned at the ‘serious increase’ in the number of Chinese in Liverpool. They called on the Home Secretary to enforce

²³ *Lewis’s handy guide*, pp. 3, 44–143, 3.

²⁴ *Lewis’s guide*, p. 73.

²⁵ *Lewis’s guide*, p. 75.

'rigidly' the provisions of the Aliens Act in the interests of 'moral welfare' and because of the state's duty to the 'many unfortunate unemployed of our countrymen'. The commission, of which both Sexton and Harford were members, concluded that in December 1906 there were 224 resident and 132 transient Chinese in Liverpool; that although the Chinese were given to gambling they did so only amongst themselves and no crime had resulted from this activity; that a number of Chinese men had married local women but that the women were happy and well-treated; and that there was only a small number of cases to support the claim of 'frequent illicit intercourse' of Chinese men with local young women and the use of Chinese laundries as cover for brothels. Nevertheless, the commission wanted the Aliens Act strengthened to prevent further immigration.²⁶

Lewis's guide took a more liberal approach. It argued that since the commission's report the Chinese community had gone about its business quietly. The majority of Chinese were good citizens, honest, courteous, and entirely 'inoffensive'. Their laundry work was excellent and their cooking altogether admirable. Moreover, the British had in the past 'parcelled out' for themselves a considerable part of the earth's surface. If 'John Chinaman' strove to absorb Pitt Street, the heart of the Chinese settlement, he was doing no more than the British traders who had settled in Chinese seaports.²⁷ *Lewis's guide*, in seeing the Chinese community as enhancing the image of the city, was almost a century ahead of its time. By the late twentieth century the city's authorities were trumpeting Liverpool's Chinatown, based on the Pitt Street area, as a major tourist attraction.

From the mid-1850s the choice of Liverpool as the venue for the conferences of prestigious professional and learned societies was recognition that the city was indeed a centre of some importance and worthy of being visited by the great and the good. To that extent the guides had fulfilled their purpose. They had raised the profile of Liverpool to such an extent that British Association for the Advancement of Science met there in 1854. Prestigious national conferences led to the appearance of specialised guides for the specialised readership provided by the conferences. For the British

²⁶ Liverpool City Council, *Council Proceedings*, 1906/7, 'Commission to inquire into Chinese Settlements in Liverpool', pp. 1,739–53.

²⁷ *Lewis's guide*, p. 75.

Association meeting of 1854 Dr David Thompson provided *The stranger's vade mecum*.

Thompson's theme was improvement and social progress. By implication Liverpool compared favourably with any other town or city in the country. He hoped that those attending the British Association conference would see more of Liverpool than the splendid St George's Hall, where the conference sessions were to be held. Liverpool merited a 'more extensive acquaintance'. Time spent examining its public buildings would be well repaid by 'the remembrance of what has been done for our social and religious improvement'. In many ways Thompson's book was a standard guidebook but with some specialised material, emphasising his theme of social improvement, for the members of the British Association. Thus he included a section on the courts and prisons. Walton Gaol, 'this gigantic prison, erected at enormous expense', he considered well worth visiting, but presumably not as an inmate. There was also a chapter on the improvement of cemetery provision for Liverpool. Referring to a recent Order in Council, which had directed the closing of graveyards in Liverpool, he was appalled as a medical man that dead bodies should ever have been allowed 'to repose within our cities', a practice which he considered 'disgraceful to our civilised position'. Developing his theme of social improvement, he discussed the progress made by the 'Medical Police' in the provision of sanitation, the regulation of baths and washhouses, and the control of slaughterhouses. Included in this section was a survey of the mortality rate of Liverpool, of population growth generally and of the rate of emigration. On a lighter note Thompson provided a valuable piece of local information to any gourmets within the ranks of the British Association. The best oyster bar in Liverpool was Shaw's in Basnett Street. There was 'no place in town which will surpass it'. Surprisingly this is one of very few references in Liverpool guides to oyster bars, a feature of the Liverpool culinary scene until well into the second half of the twentieth century.²⁸

Thompson's *Stranger's vade mecum* was the forerunner of numerous guides produced for the benefit of members of learned societies, professional associations and special interest groups meeting in Liverpool. The British Association itself went to great lengths in 1896 to ensure that its members were comprehensively informed

²⁸ Thompson, *The stranger's vade mecum*, pp. 67, 69, 166–75, 181.

about Liverpool and its suitability as a venue for professional scientists. For its meeting in Liverpool that year it produced two complementary volumes, *Handbook to Liverpool* and *Liverpool excursion guide book*. In his preface to the *Handbook*, W. A. Herdman, Professor of Biology at University College, expressed the hope that, as there was no existing scientific guide to Liverpool, his work would fill the gap for members of the Association and perhaps have a 'more permanent and extended use'.²⁹ By implication Liverpool was at the cutting edge of science and worthy of such a scientific guide.

The British Association *Handbook* was nothing if not comprehensive. It included chapters on history and antiquities, geology, vertebrate fauna, marine fauna, entomology, botany, climate, the river and tides, docks and engineering works, trade and commerce, the developments of the chemical industries of Liverpool, plus an appendix on the Isle of Man, covering its history, antiquities, and a sketch of its marine biology by Herdman himself. All of this provided material and opportunity for scientific study. The companion volume, the *Liverpool excursion guide book*, outlined seventeen organised excursions, during and after the Association's meeting. These would provide illustration of the scientific themes outlined by Herdman in the *Handbook*. They included sight seeing trips on the River Mersey and the Overhead Railway, visits to Speke Hall, Chester, the North Wales resorts, and 'scientific tourism', such as the observation of dredging and trawling in Liverpool Bay's offshore fishing grounds, visits to railway works at Horwich and Crewe, and to the waterworks at Rivington and Lake Vyrnwy, the Manchester Ship Canal and the Northwich and Weaver Navigation. The excursions varied in duration from half a day to a five-day visit to the Isle of Man for archaeologists, zoologists and botanists, and a seven-day visit to the Lake District after the meeting.

By the time the Royal Institute of Public Health, 1903, and the British Medical Association, 1912, met in Liverpool the theme of social and scientific progress was well-established as the leit motif of such gatherings. The Royal Institute of Public Health's *Handbook*, however, was hardly a vade mecum, being folio-sized, 329 pages long, printed on glossy paper and illustrated with photographs. Its editor, E. W. Hope, Liverpool's Medical Officer of Health and Honorary General Secretary of the Congress, felt that some account

²⁹ British Association, *Handbook*, pp. iii-iv.

of the city, its institutions and ‘special features’ would be of interest. In addition to this general information the Royal Institute *Handbook* had special interest sections, carefully chosen to highlight the dominant theme of social progress in the city, for members of the Congress. Thus it listed the hospitals, medical institutions and nursing associations, with a description of the public services, such as the police, fire, tramways, municipal engineer’s department and sanitary provision. A special section was devoted to the crematorium, a symbol of scientific and hygienic progress by the beginning of the twentieth century. Liverpool was able to demonstrate that it disposed of its dead hygienically.³⁰

Nine years after the Public Health Congress, the British Medical Association met in Liverpool and, as was now de rigeur, produced its own *Handbook*. It provided a sketch of the medical history of Liverpool, essentially a guide to the progress Liverpool had made in the fields of medicine and public health. It described municipal and ‘other undertakings’, the university and medical school, and Liverpool’s hospitals. Town planning and what it could do for Liverpool was also discussed. There was a programme of excursions to places of interest in Lancashire and North Wales, in addition to what could be seen in Liverpool itself. The BMA *Handbook* drew attention to another symbol of Liverpool’s claim to be one of the leading cities of the British Empire, the recently completed Royal Liver Building on the riverfront. Three hundred feet in height, it was one of the ‘tallest skyscrapers in the country’. Its clock, each dial twenty-five feet in diameter, its minute hand fourteen feet long and three feet wide at one point, was bigger than Big Ben. Incorporating in its design the latest scientific technology it never needed winding being ‘worked by electricity and regulated direct from Greenwich’.³¹

Additionally, the *Handbook*, sponsored by the City Council, extracted from the 1911 national census an array of statistics, illustrating Liverpool’s growth, development and civic achievements. The population stood at 741,566. There were nine parliamentary divisions with 87,659 registered voters. The corporation had built nearly 3,000 houses for the working class population, providing accommodation for 14,000 people at a gross annual rent of £28,000. The city boasted over 150 schools, 58 Council,

³⁰ Royal Institute of Public Health, *Handbook*, pp. 45–76.

³¹ British Medical Association, *Handbook*, p. 190.

56 Church of England, 40 Roman Catholic and eight Wesleyan and non-denominational. These schools were staffed by 3,908 teachers, three quarters of whom were women. Reflecting social and cultural change as well as architectural development, the *Handbook* listed in its section on Liverpool's theatres, five cinemas, beginning with the Palais de Luxe in Lime Street.³²

The Jubilee Congress of District Nursing (1909), the Church Congress (1904), and the Institute of Mechanical Engineers (1909), all produced handbooks tailored to the needs of their members. The District Nursing Association had an intensive business programme in Central Hall, Renshaw Street, leavened only by two receptions, the first in the Town Hall given by the Mayor, the second in the Walker Art Gallery by the Liverpool Queen Victoria Nursing Association. There was one excursion to RMS *Mauretania* at the invitation of the Cunard Company. The ecclesiastics visiting the Church Congress received extensive notes on the history of Liverpool and a comprehensive listing and description of Liverpool's Anglican churches.³³ The mechanical engineers had the opportunity to inspect the progress made in Liverpool and the surrounding area in the development of industrial technology by visits to the Corporation Electricity Works, Bryant and May's match factory, Cammell Laird's ship repair yards, the Mersey Railway powerhouse and pumping station, Port Sunlight works and village, the University engineering laboratories and the Anderton Boat Lift. Light relief could be found in day trips to Southport and Chester, while Liverpool's vaunted cultural treasures could be sampled through the programme of visits to the Walker Art Gallery, the Picton Reading Rooms and St George's Hall organised by the Ladies Committee.

As with the hosting of national conferences of prestigious societies the fact that Liverpool was chosen as the venue for the International Exhibition of Navigation, Travelling, Commerce and Manufacture in 1886 was an indication of her growing reputation as a city of more than local and national importance. Guides, official and unofficial, were produced for the delight and edification of visitors. The Liverpool International Exhibition *Visitors' guide* and *All about the Liverpool Exhibition*, contained the standard information about Liverpool's public buildings. Both of them speculated about the origin of the name Liverpool, using almost identical language; 'The

³² British Medical Association, *Handbook*, pp. 195–96.

³³ *Guide to the Church Congress*, pp. 39–80, 81–125.

derivation of the name is shrouded in obscurity which the minds of antiquaries have so far been unable to penetrate', and 'The source of the name . . . is shrouded in an obscurity which our antiquaries have not yet been able to penetrate'.³⁴ *All about* also included a lengthy section devoted to the annals of Liverpool from 666 to 1886.³⁵

The *Visitors' guide*, as an official guide, strove to impress on the visitor that Liverpool was indeed a worthy place to hold the International Exhibition. This led to some special pleading to minimise any alleged deficiencies which might damage its claims to international standing. Thus to Liverpool belonged the distinction of being the pioneer in developments of Britain's railway system. A sleepy fishing village, struggling in obscurity, had grown into a huge city, which had made its presence felt throughout the world. In the older part of the city 'the hand of the improver had not been idle'. Old thoroughfares had been widened and new ones opened to cope with the demands of increasing traffic. Some of the 'unsavoury memorials of our forefathers' lack of foresight' had been swept away. Tortuous lanes and alleys, dens of dirt and vice had been replaced by modern blocks of warehouses, shops and offices and stately public buildings. True, Liverpool had not been laid out on a well-defined symmetrical plan like Philadelphia, New York, or Chicago and the visitor might notice the absence of a 'consistent and definite architectural plan' in the leading thoroughfares, but it could be argued that the city was still in a transitional stage and in St George's Hall could boast a 'crowning architectural glory'.³⁶

Recognition of a different kind of Liverpool's claims to be a great commercial and cultural centre, a visit to which would be enriching and rewarding, came in its choice by the great Bass brewing company of Burton as the destination for the annual excursion it organised for its workforce. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century Liverpool was chosen on a number of occasions as the venue for what was intended to be a recreational, educational and generally uplifting cultural visit. On these excursions fifteen or more trains left Burton at regular intervals beginning as early as 4am and returned from Liverpool in the evening. The whole paternalist enterprise was planned with the attention to detail and precision of a military operation. Strict

³⁴ *Visitors' guide*, p. 1, *All about the Liverpool Exhibition*, p. 50.

³⁵ *All about the Liverpool Exhibition*, pp. 107–76.

³⁶ *Visitors' guide*, pp. 13, 15, 28–29, 55.

instructions were given to all those travelling to Liverpool that they must travel to and from the city on their own train. Anyone found disobeying this regulation would be left behind at Burton or Liverpool and the excursion ticket would be 'forfeited'. Further, all passengers were exhorted to be 'quiet and orderly'. There should be no throwing of empty bottles (Bass bottles, presumably) out of the train windows as this was dangerous to plate-layers and other railway workers.³⁷

Once arrived in Liverpool, those who had the 'great privilege' of being part of the 'largest single excursion organised by a single firm' could enjoy the delights of the city.³⁸ The programme reflected what the employers thought would provide an uplifting and educational experience. There was little pandering to the perhaps more populist tastes or wishes of the workers. In 1904 the Burton on Trent Volunteer Band gave two Grand Concerts in St George's Hall, and the Walker Art Gallery, the Meyer Museum and the Picton Reading Rooms offered special tours. There were free trips on the Liverpool Overhead Railway to see the wonders of Liverpool's docks. Perhaps as a concession to more popular taste New Brighton, Llandudno and the Isle of Man could be visited by ferry or steamer.³⁹ To ensure that those requiring refreshment should not be deprived of their regular dose of Bass a list of hotels and vaults in Liverpool, New Brighton, and the Isle of Man where 'Bass is kept' was provided.⁴⁰ In 1904 the list was supplemented by a verse tribute to the qualities of Bass.

Is there an ale that can surpass
The sparkling ale that's brewed by Bass?
The famous Burton waters make
This ale's a kingly drink to take
It cheers the heart when hope is low
and makes the soul with vigour glow,
It aids digestion-makes us hale
My blessings on you good old ale.⁴¹

Later excursions followed the pattern set in 1895 but by 1912, the brewery's last excursion to Liverpool before World War One, Bass's guide took account of the great changes which were taking place on

³⁷ Bass, *Excursion* (1904), p. 5.

³⁸ Bass, *Excursion* (1895), p. 9.

³⁹ Bass, *Excursion* (1904), pp. 17, 18, 25, 26.

⁴⁰ Bass, *Excursion* (1895), p. 43.

⁴¹ Bass, *Excursion* (1904), p. 92.

Liverpool's river front. The excursionists' attention was drawn to a 'new place of interest', the Royal Liver Friendly Society's building.

The view of the city from the river is a very striking one, and embraces the magnificent offices of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, and the very prominent new buildings of the Royal Liver Friendly Society.

This new structure, the Liver Building, was 'most imposing'. Next to St George's Hall it was the 'most impressive pile' in the city.⁴² The presumption was that it was worth travelling from Burton to Liverpool to see this new wonder of the world, a presumption which would have been strongly endorsed by the city fathers.

By the time of this last pre-war Bass excursion to Liverpool the city fathers, rather belatedly recognising the need for some form of municipal public relations exercise, had produced their own first official guide.⁴³ This glossy, large format production was lavishly illustrated and was a coffee-table or reference book rather than a vade mecum or pocket guide. It was intended as a demonstration of official civic pride and of belief in Liverpool. The city as the major port of the British Empire was at the height of its commercial success and prosperity. The magnificent new buildings erected and planned for its waterfront were symbols of this. Yet the beginnings of the port's relative decline were not far away. There was almost a recognition of this, albeit an unconscious one, in the strangely apologetic tone adopted in the introduction to the City of Liverpool's *Official handbook*. For the city fathers who had commissioned it, it had

long been a matter of regret that the greater number of travellers who use the great seaport as a point of arrival and departure have not hitherto considered the city sufficiently attractive to induce them to break their journey.

The apologetic tone was continued with the *Official handbook's* admission that Liverpool was not rich in relics of the past. However, in more up-beat mood, it argued that this was more than compensated for by the 'magnificence' of its modern buildings, its world-renowned docks, its striking monuments and its beautiful parks and gardens. All of these latter were of course symbols of the civic progress which marked Liverpool as a great city. To emphasise this

⁴² Bass, *Excursion* (1912), pp. 10, 14.

⁴³ City of Liverpool, *Official handbook*.

claim the *Official handbook* was lavishly illustrated with photographs of Liverpool's most striking buildings, parks and places of interest. Similarly Liverpool's literary associations with such luminaries as Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, William Roscoe, Mrs Hemans, Arthur Clough and William Gladstone were highlighted and it was argued that these alone should be sufficient to warrant at least a short stay in the city.⁴⁴ Additionally the cultural riches of Liverpool were prominently illustrated by the inclusion at the end of the *Official handbook* of seven pages of high-quality reproductions of works from the city's art treasures in the Walker Art Gallery, including Gabriel Dante Rossetti's 'Dante's Dream' and W. F. Yeames's 'And when did you last see your father?'

The 1906 *Official handbook*, although later editions followed, can be seen as the swansong of the Liverpool guidebook era. This era coincided with Liverpool's emergence as the second city and leading port, outside of London, in Britain and its empire. Liverpool's mercantile prominence was well established by the end of the eighteenth century. The guidebooks which began to appear at that time were a reflection of Liverpool's position and were essentially symbols of civic and commercial pride. Rather surprisingly the task of projecting the city's image was left for a century in the hands of private entrepreneurs and, later, that of professional and learned societies. A corporate municipal response only came with the *Official handbook*. Private entrepreneurs saw far earlier the commercial opportunities which could be created by a positive projection of an image of Liverpool as a city which embodied the spirit of progress. If the great European cultural centres, cities such as Paris, Rome and Florence, were worthy of their guides so was the great mercantile centre of Liverpool at the end of the eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century.

The format and content of Liverpool's guides were essentially the format of the guides to Europe's great cultural centres. Accordingly there was a great emphasis on fine public buildings and churches, even if those in Liverpool could in no sense compete with the glories of Paris and Rome. (Some later Liverpool guides did in fact admit this.) Few guides projected, or even attempted to project, an objective view of their subject. Liverpool guides were no exception to this rule. They accentuated what they saw as the positive features

⁴⁴ City of Liverpool, *Official handbook*, p. 7.

of the town. There were no descriptions of Liverpool's appalling working class housing conditions in the middle and late nineteenth century, apart from the oblique references made in the accounts of Liverpool prepared for scientific congresses where, of course, the emphasis was on the provision of public health facilities and on sanitary progress. If the visitor wanted descriptions of the misery of cellar dwellings or court housing, a most unlikely eventuality, these would be found buried in the annual reports of the Medical Officer of Health. Likewise there was no discussion of the vicious religious sectarianism, which marred Liverpool's civic life as the nineteenth century progressed. The source of much of Liverpool's wealth at the end of the eighteenth century, the slave trade, was almost a taboo subject. When the earliest guides were being written the abolitionist debate was raging and it was difficult to avoid some comment if Liverpool's position was to be defended. Once abolition was achieved there were no further references to the trade. The fact that Liverpool owed much of its commercial dominance to the slave trade was quietly forgotten.

However, guidebooks, especially nineteenth century ones, did not set out to paint a 'warts and all' picture. Certainly Liverpool guides did not. Their purpose was to extol the virtues and attractions of the city, of its commitment to the nineteenth century virtues of the search for improvement and progress. They aimed to project a positive image and to avoid as far as it was possible any discussion of what could be perceived as negative features. They may seem rather 'pious' and perhaps even a little pompous to the reader from a later age. But as early attempts at 'public relations' they are an under-used source for those wishing to understand more fully the aspirations and claims of those who saw themselves as the nineteenth century urban elite. The guides tell us much of nineteenth century civic values and they were affirmations of pride in what Liverpool had achieved. Liverpool's achievements, albeit as a centre of commercial rather than governmental activity, it was felt, were every bit as worthy of celebration as the glories of Tyre and Carthage, Florence and Rome, or those of the great modern European cities. Celebration of the achievements of commerce and trade, of urban progress, and of the middle classes, which directed commerce and trade and brought about urban progress, was for the Liverpool guides as worthy a task as the celebration of the glories of the great cities of the ancient world.

APPENDIX: LIST OF GUIDES

This list is arranged alphabetically by author or by the first significant word of the title.

- The Adelphi guide to Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1872).
- Bass, Radcliffe and Gretton Ltd, *Excursion to Liverpool* (Burton, 1895, 1904, 1912).
- Black's guide to Liverpool and Birkenhead with environs including New Brighton and Southport* (Edinburgh, 1865).
- Bon Marché souvenir guide book* (Liverpool, 1908).
- British Association, *Handbook to Liverpool and its neighbourhood*, ed. W. A. Herdman (Liverpool, 1896).
- British Association, *Liverpool excursion guide book*, ed. Isaac C. Thompson (Liverpool, 1896).
- British Medical Association, *Annual meeting 1912: Handbook* (Liverpool, 1912).
- Brown, Alexander, *Smith's strangers' guide to Liverpool, its environs and part of Cheshire* (Liverpool, 1842).
- City of Liverpool, *Official handbook* (Liverpool, 1906).
- Cornish's guide to Liverpool and Manchester with the traveller's companion on the railway* (Liverpool, 1838).
- Guide to the Church Congress and Ecclesiastical Art Exhibition*, ed. F. J. Powell (London, 1902).
- Handbook to Liverpool or a guide to the stranger and resident* (Liverpool, 1854).
- Institute of Mechanical Engineers, *Proceedings* (London, 1909).
- Jubilee Congress of District Nursing, *Report* (Liverpool, 1909).
- Lewis's guide to Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1908).
- Lewis's handy guide to Liverpool and neighbourhood* (Liverpool, 1884).
- Liverpool as it is* (Manchester, 1871).
- Liverpool International Exhibition of Navigation, Travelling, Commerce and Manufacture, 1886: *Visitors' guide to Liverpool with pictorial map showing at a glance the principal buildings and places of interest* (Liverpool 1886).
- [Liverpool International Exhibition] *All about the Liverpool Exhibition together with a concise guide to Liverpool and places worth seeing on the Cheshire side of the river* (Liverpool, 1886).

- Moss, W., *The Liverpool guide. Including a sketch of the environs with a map of the town* (Liverpool, 1796).
- New penny pocket guide to Liverpool* (London, 1878).
- The picture of Liverpool or stranger's guide* (Liverpool, 1833).
- The picturesque handbook to Liverpool for the resident and the visitor* (Liverpool, 1842).
- Royal Institute of Public Health, *Handbook compiled for the Congress*, ed. E. W. Hope (Liverpool, 1903).
- Royal picturesque handbook to Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1852).
- Stonehouse, J., *Pictorial Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1844).
- The stranger in Liverpool or an historical and descriptive view of Liverpool and its environs* (Liverpool, 1807).
- Thompson, David P., *The stranger's vade mecum, or Liverpool described. A guide to every object of interest in the town and its vicinity together with the Cheshire coast* (Liverpool, 1854).
- Wallace, Henry, *A general and descriptive history of the ancient and present state of the town of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1795).

