Living in Liverpool

Living in Liverpool:
A Collection of Sources for Family, Local and Social Historians

By

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CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS

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To Kay, Ben, Gabriel and Sam.

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FOREWORD

The aim of this publication is to make a collection of sources relating to Liverpool's social history of its working classes between 1830-1914 more widely available to social, family and local historians. These sources will examine 'living in Liverpool' through the themes of the built environment, work, family life and budgets together with Liverpool's leisure. Within these themes are worked the experiences of differing ethnic groups from differing parts of the city. The introductory notes aim to provide the context to the sources, with the sources themselves in a separate section. Hugh Shimmin's 'Sunday in the slums' represents a vibrant perambulation of Liverpool's working class areas. Dr. Duncan's Report for the **State of Large Towns** gives a more detailed, but similarly graphic picture of living conditions in the town.[1] Perhaps even more vivid images come from Parkes and Sanderson's visit to six Liverpool streets in 1871 as part of their investigation of Liverpool's sewage system. Statistical detail is given of the northern part of the town by two remarkable investigations, by the free trade champion, John Finch in 1842 and by the evangelical Abraham Hume in 1850. In contrast, Shimmin also contributes several Liverpool stories, part fiction and part factual, to this collection, including cautionary tales about a typical 'Liverpool christening' and 'a Poor Boy's Saturday night.'

This collection has also sought to encompass material hidden in national journals (for example a visit to Cope's tobacco factory) and material by national journalists (for example the section on cruelty to Liverpool children in George Sims' **The Black Stain**).

Hopefully those interested in family, local and social history will get a feel for the Liverpool of the past, its built environment, work opportunities and the struggle to make ends meet in the city. With a city as rich in history as Liverpool, inevitably much will be missed out. It would have been possible to include not only more about groups such as Irish, but also the Welsh and Scottish settlers. Liverpool's radical past, education and sport are themes which have been similarly neglected. Again, the picture painted of Liverpool from the sources reprinted here has been overly skewed to what was seen at the time as problematic- the interest of contemporaries was inevitably drawn to what they perceived as what was 'wrong' in the city than what they felt was going right. There are

remarkably few working class voices presenting their observations here. But nestling amidst this can be found the exuberant enthusiasm of the description of Liverpool's new baths in 1844, the Borough Surveyor, James Newlands when boasting of civic success in public health in 1859 and nestling amongst the poverty statistics are the coping skills of the working class mothers in Rathbone's remarkable study of 1909.

Notes

[1] Liverpool became a city in 1880, the terms 'city' and 'town' are applied loosely, but not pedantically to correspond with this change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The idea of a collection of sources on Liverpool's history began when I was teaching a group of enthusiastic students as part of a Continuing Education class for Liverpool University. It soon became clear as I ventured on this project that I could have completed several volumes, not just one. The choice of material in this book therefore represents my own areas of interest. This collection does not pretend to be an exhaustive social history of Liverpool. I've tried to put suggestions for further exploration of topics in my footnotes. Those interested in Liverpool's history should also consult publications by John Belchem and Philip Waller, whilst Freddie O'Connor has put together images of a 'lost' Liverpool.

My colleague, Alison Rothwell provided IT assistance and advice and I'd also like to thank Amanda at Cambridge Scholars Press for her patience over the production of this book. I'd like to thank Alyson Brown for helping me get this project off the ground and Tony Webster and John Walton for their encouragement- any errors in this book however are my own.

The never-failing courtesy of Liverpool Record Office's staff deserves a special mention. It has been an enjoyable task compiling this collection. My last half day visit to the city allowed me to sample an impromptu session of tai chi within the blitzed shell of St. Luke's church and afforded a discussion of 1970's Liverpool with a noted photographer in the Walker Art Gallery café all by chance. As Benjamin Orchard commented of Liverpool-it is no mean city.

INTRODUCTION

IMAGES OF LIVERPOOL

Liverpool was a wonder of the Victorian age. Its bustling docks were regarded as highlight of any visit to the city with tourists being urged to view the enclosed docks from the vantage point of the first class carriages of the Overhead Railway. The city's civic buildings likewise were commended to visitors, although as nineteenth century observers noted, (see **documents 1 and 2**) the proximity of the town centre to the docks meant an uncomfortable mix of rags and riches. Some of Liverpool's own citizens were bold enough to comment that the grander civic improvements, such as St. George's Hall were at the expense of improvements which benefited Liverpool's poorest citizens. Liverpool might have little history, and whilst some sources in compensation stressed Liverpool's maritime heritage in the eighteenth century, other writers seemed proud enough to boast about Liverpool's fortune suddenly arising from humble origins, 'a city without ancestors.'[1] Document two conveys the sense of activity and money making, a city of perpetual motion. Liverpool epitomised enterprise, a product of the vigour of its leading citizens; a self made city for an age which revelled in the virtues of the self made man. Lord Erskine in 1791had praised the up and coming town which contained 'all things which can delight a man' created 'by the industry and well-disciplined industry of a handful of men.' Typical perhaps of such ambitions in the small scale was James Hopkinson, a small time furniture dealer and cabinet maker, who was drawn to Victorian Liverpool as a place to do business and reflected in his memoirs how inferior his position would have been had he moved to elsewhere. Liverpool society afforded an opportunity to network with the powerful. Orchard advised that, a steady young man commencing life in Liverpool without capital or good friends cannot do better for his own business future than by joining and becoming active, useful and respected in a large dissenting congregation,' advice which those on the make like Hopkinson appeared to have taken to heart. Similarly, a chance for Liverpool's tradesmen class to move upwards was in the shape of philanthropic work. [2]

It was a place which provoked comment. The reaction of diarist Francis Kilvert in the 1870's was that of 'an impression of ragged Irish, barefoot women and children, enormous wealth and squalid poverty, wildernesses of offices and palatial counting houses.'[3] Liverpool's growth prompted its natives to make similar comments. Lorraine, the incumbent of Holy Trinity Church in 1866, captured this Jekyll and Hyde nature of the city with its

> Vast population, its magnificent port… its noble public buildings, its enlightenment, activities, enterprise and opulence… the outside of our social life is fair and full of promise but within it is foul, vicious and corrupt. The stranger that walks along our great thoroughfares, looks into our public buildings, sees the shops and the ships, the warehouses and the docks… is generally struck with admiration. But if we make a more careful inquiry into our real social state… we must turn aside from the wide handsome streets into the dark, dirty, death breeding courts.[4]

For all this new money and new wealth Liverpool's elite saw themselves as Liverpool gentlemen in contrast to the Manchester men, a view reinforced by Guinness Orchard in his weighty tome, *Liverpool's Legion of Honour*, on the great and good of late Victorian Liverpool. To Orchard, Liverpool's upper class propensity of sending their offspring to public schools and their involvement in 'field sports' gave them access to 'Society.' Thus, Orchard concludes, comparing Manchester men to Liverpool gentlemen 'was no empty sneer' with Liverpool, despite its provincial situation, being 'no mean city.'[5] Liverpool might well have revelled in its self-proclaimed status as second city of the Empire[6] but it had, as Waller cogently observed it possessed the problems of urban society manifest in 'extraordinary dimensions.'[7] And contemporary Liverpool possessed an unnerving self awareness. Its Medical Officer of Heath declared the town to be 'the unhealthiest in England'; a civic leader could acknowledge the place 'sodden in drink,' whilst a prominent Catholic cleric could call the very poorest of his co-religionists 'the dregs.' Liverpool was a place of civic enterprise too; its problems provoked resourcefulness: if it had some of the worst slums it produced the first council houses; if it had the some of the worst health problems it produced some of the most pioneering solutions such as baths and wash-houses. Clearly separate from its hinterland, if not at first by speech (the ' Dicky Sam' or Liverpudlian had until at least the 1880's as some of these sources indicate a South Lancashire accent[8]), then by ethnic grouping Liverpool appeared to identify itself more with cosmopolitan New York than neighbouring Lancashire. It was a place which *The Times* argued in 1875 still saw itself as 'the good old town' and (in what current historians would phrase as Liverpool exceptionalism[9])

defined itself as' a very peculiar place.'[10] Liverpool was a city which spawned a running commentary on its evils, pleasures and foibles. Much of this rich material has been overlooked by historians who have focused on metropolitan commentaries neglecting Liverpool's wealth of social observation.

Liverpool's environmental problems defined

At the end of the nineteenth century Liverpool was viewed in many respects, as a healthy town. The sea breezes were thought to blow away impurities, and, until the first quarter of the nineteenth century, sea bathing complete with bathing machines was evident on the shore. Moss in his *Medical Survey of Liverpool*, published in 1784, certainly viewed the town as intrinsically healthy. His reservations about the health of the town tellingly lay in the narrowness of the streets and the onset of 'vice and immorality' as potential future problems.[11] Baines, in his 1824 *Directory and Gazetteer of Lancashire* felt able to echo Lord Erskine's observation that Liverpool was 'another Venice.'

Dr Currie, however at the end of the eighteenth century had been the first health commentator to voice concerns about the singularity of Liverpool's housing stock. Noting the preponderance of the narrow alleys, or courts, (formed by exploiting garden and yard space behind street frontage) he prophetically commented, 'this type of building is to be lamented.'[12]

Equivocation over Liverpool's heath continued into the early Victorian era. One response by local dignitaries to Dr Duncan's evidence to a Parliamentary Inquiry into 'the state of large towns' in 1844 was to describe it as 'an unmerited libel on the good old town.' Duncan's testimony served not only to describe Liverpool's environmental conditions which led to its unenviable position as the unhealthiest town in Britain, but sought to explain why Liverpool, with an apparently salubrious situation, possessed such a high death rate.

Dr Duncan knew Liverpool; he was physician to the Royal Infirmary, a lecturer at the Infirmary Medical School, and was prominent in the town's Literary and Philosophical Society. It was however Duncan's experience as physician to the South Dispensary (an honorary position which provided charitable medical aid to the poor) which gave him real insight into the problems of the poorer districts. Duncan was active in pressing for greater legislative powers and his appointment as Liverpool's First Medical Officer of Health in 1847 led some critics to sneer that he had done rather well out of criticising Liverpool's health. By 1850

Liverpool was paying the handsome salary of £750 for Duncan's services with James Newlands as Borough Surveyor receiving £700 plus a horse 'and vehicle.' If ratepayers were coming round to the fact that Duncan might be good value for money they were perhaps less convinced by Newlands. Commenting on the salaries, the *Liverpool Mercury* added the aside that, '[we] cannot but help but expressing what we know to be the feelings of many persons, that either the one is much over-paid for the duties appertaining to his office, or the other receives inadequate remuneration for his services.' [13] Newlands was to yet to prove his worth[14].

Duncan attempted to untangle the problem as to why some districts were healthy whilst others were unhealthy. He realised that country districts were healthier than urban ones. But the puzzling fact was that within Liverpool, certain districts were healthier than others. Why did Abercromby and Rodney Street Wards have lower mortality and fever than the Exchange and Vauxhall Wards? Looking at Duncan's **The Physical Causes of the High rate of Mortality in Liverpool,[15] (document 3)** we can see how Duncan attempts to analyse Liverpool's housing problems.

In the first place there is the pattern of filling space at the back of existing buildings to form courts and alleys. In Table 10[16] for example we can see how Duncan links fever cases to certain housing types, notably the court and cellar dwellings. At this time, perhaps one third of Liverpool's working class inhabited courts and cellars.

Additionally, overcrowding added to the problems **[see document 4]** as the larger houses of the departed middle classes were systematically sub-divided for working class tenants and even the purpose built slums in the northern part of the town were sub-let by the room

Duncan's report clearly shows the cumulative environmental disadvantages which hit the disadvantaged hardest. For example, as Table 14 in the extract shows, Liverpool's sewers[17]provided the poorest districts with the poorest drainage. Duncan felt that the diminished quality of the air, denuded by the exhalations of the population was also to blame. This, to Duncan's mind related to the other factors which were present in the unhealthiest areas, the overcrowding and poor ventilation of courts and alleys. If the early Victorians were uncertain about the exact transmission of disease, like Duncan they did make the connection that understanding the physical environment was the key to improving public health.

What then, must it have been like to live in court and alley housing? The sources by Duncan and Holmes (see document six) give a fair idea of courts at their worst. In these narrow, tall houses there would be a 'day

room' on the ground floor with a bedroom in each of the two storeys above. A cellar was often situated below, occasionally used for washing or for storage (sometimes degenerating into a dumping ground for all kinds of refuse) but often, like the bedrooms, separately let to tenants. The middle room would be occupied by the chief tenants for living and sleeping whilst another family occupied the lower room and attic. The attic, lacking a fireplace, could only be used for sleeping, not cooking, with usually only the lower part of the sash capable of being opened. The joinery fitments were generally of such a poor quality so as to admit draughts, although such accidental ventilation was often stopped up by the tenants much to the despair of sanitary reformers. Cellar dwellings were allegedly valued by their occupants because they had their own private entry but were often overcrowded with the poorest of tenants, and prone to flooding, with their inhabitants having to resort to forming small holes near the cellar steps or in the cellar floor to drain excess water. In extreme cases the cellar door was taken off its hinges and laid on the floor supported by bricks to allow the occupants to escape the inundation of their dwellings. Cellar atmosphere was often muggy and close as many tenants lit coal fires to mitigate the damp. All these evils could be exacerbated by the fact that seepage from the courts' privies sometimes found its way into the cellars. One cellar in Lace Street in 1842 was reported to be two feet in 'filthy water' whilst in another a 'well' (in reality a hole dug to drain water) held four feet of fetid water just below where the residents slept.[18] Given that Liverpool's Inspector of Nuisances in the mid-nineteenth century found over two thousand middens a year reported as 'overflowing' these descriptions were probably not exaggerations. The Borough Engineer, Newlands, described court housing as:

> Generally built back to back, one end of the court, as a rule, is closed either by houses, or, which is worse, by the privies and ash pits; or a worse state of things still the privies and ash pits are placed at the entrance of the court, and the only air supplied to the inhabitants must pass over their foul contents. But even this miserable state of things can be outdone. There are courts which by a perverted ingenuity, have been formed in the following manner: - an ordinary street house has had its lobby converted into a common passage leading to the back yard. The passage is of course roofed over, and is, in fact, a tunnel from which the back room of the original house, now converted into a separate dwelling, has its entrance. The back yard has been filled with other houses in such a manner as to have only the continuation of the tunnel for access and from this little area three feet wide the houses receive their supply of light and air. The passage is generally terminated by the privy and ashpit common to all the wretched dwellings, with its liquid filth oozing through their walls, and its

> pestiferous gases flowing into the windows of the last two houses. The structural evils of these miserable abodes are aggravated by the filthy habits of the inhabitants. Even when the middens have been filled so as to overflow the court, no one cared to take the trouble to appraise the officers of the Nuisance Department of the fact in order to have them emptied.[19]

Newlands in the 1860's still managed to find courts without privies, courts where the privies were below street level and even whole courts which were below street level. It could be argued that some clauses of public health legislation, such as those permitting the front of the court to be restricted to six feet in width by the placing of two privies near the entrance to the court hardly made the situation better.

One feature of Liverpool's courts and alleys was the lack of outhouses for the washing of clothes in contrast with the 'brew houses' to be found in Birmingham's court slums. The origins of pioneering municipal wash-houses were famously to be found in the actions of Kitty Wilkinson taking in her neighbours' washing during the 1832-3 cholera epidemic. Washing potentially infected bedding in one's kitchen was an heroic action which merited local commemoration (in a later stained glass panel in the Anglican Cathedral for instance). Elizabeth and William Rathbone, together with the District Providence Society, encouraged the continuation of this experiment after the epidemic. The idea was then further promoted by the Rathbones to become the basis for a successful municipal venture whilst Kitty and her husband fittingly perhaps became superintendents of one of the early wash houses. Lyon Playfair's description of the Liverpool's baths and wash houses in the scheme's infancy (**document 5**) reveals how the baths worked in practice. The baths described in this extract were at Upper Frederick Street but others soon followed.[20] By 1856 nearly 25,000 persons had used the municipal baths. The Cornwallis baths built in 1849, were even larger than those at Fredrick Street, and were aimed at all graduations of Liverpool's society, with three plunge baths delineated by 'class', 60 private warm baths, showers and a vapour bath. True to the aims of the scheme, as described to Playfair, Cornwallis Street Baths in its early years of operation was described as, 'orderly' with 'no unnecessary noise, no bustle, even when business is brisk.'[21] This public health message was not lost on the public. The threat of cholera in 1847 produced queues outside the baths with the free places for children being halted by pressure from paying customers.[22] O'Mara however, remembered the early twentieth century Cornwallis Street baths as 'a dirty place for dirty boys' (although not as dirty, he claimed, as the Gore Street baths at the South End) In its Victorian heyday it was described as 'scrupulously

clean' and certainly attracted a better class of visitors. The Liverpool journalist Hugh Shimmin recounted how he was socially snubbed by a middle class bather whom he rescued from the from the bath's deep end. An extra two pence bought social exclusivity (becoming the reputed haunt of 'a mechanic class') with access to a swimming bath (complete with a feature centre fountain) which enjoyed the added bonus of being emptied twice a week. The plunge baths afforded even more exquisitely nuanced social graduations. The first class plunge (price one shilling) had a carpet, two chairs a bootjack, boothooks, shoehorn, 'fleshbrush', hairbrush and comb, large looking-glass, ewer and soap, three towels and the power of being able to regulate the bath's temperature. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the third class plunges lacked any of these refinements, although possibly Newlands envisaged a slightly more democratic set up.[23]. Liverpool was proud of its baths and was eager to spread the gospel of municipal cleanliness to its employees. One little-known municipal perk was free access to the baths for lodging-house inspectors as compensation for the noisome task they had to perform.

In addition, space was allocated for laundry facilities, although many of the customers were professional launderers. It did make sense even for the working classes to use the services of a laundress. The lack of outdoor space, coupled with the dirt carried by the Mersey breeze made washing a most trying task.

Morality and health were closely linked in the minds of most middle class sanitary reformers. The nomadic lifestyle of the lodging house resident, especially the Irish, awakened fears about the behaviour of the transient in a town where much of the population appeared to be transient. This was common currency in this era. Dr Kay, writing about Manchester in 1832[24], described Irish lodging house residents, who 'reckless of the morrow' were agents of disease, crime and a peculiarly feckless behaviour, 'demoralising' the previously independent English labourer.. Nor was this to be the only period when public concerns over health, crime and morality were to be manipulated in the cause of sanitary reform. In 1862, this connection was used by the journalist Hugh Shimmin. Shimmin, proprietor of the pro-Liberal *Porcupine* cum-crusading journalist, was an idiosyncratic and rather irascible individualist who delighted in exposing Liverpool's civic shortcomings. Of a working class Manx origin, he revelled in his status of self-made man and combined his blunt nature with a somewhat shabby appearance to 'ramble' around, and report on, the poorer districts of Liverpool. To Shimmin social improvement entailed municipal and individual philanthropic effort to educate and thus elevate a working class too degraded to help themselves. As part of his crusade for

new sanitary legislation for Liverpool (which led to Liverpool's Sanitary Act of 1864) he produced a series of articles, 'The Mysteries of the Courts.'

In one of these he pointed to a particularly grisly and pointless murder in a cellar off Myrtle Street in December 1862 under the lurid heading 'a dark episode in little hell.' Here, he treated his readers to a description of the unlit slum street where the murder occurred. His message was as much moral as sanitary. The slums he warned were areas of both endemic health and moral hazards. As an aside to the account of the murder itself he described to his readers how he witnessed during his visit an air of continual menace from the casual violence associated with the area. A passing drunk is about to be inveigled into a slum house to be robbed by the 'girls' of the area who are themselves the very inversion of the feminine (being 'broad-set' with 'bloated faces' and 'brawny arms'). Shimmin counselled his readers:

> A veil has been suddenly lifted during the past week, disclosing a horrible phase of court life. A woman has been murdered under circumstances which display unbridled ferocity and atrocious depravity. The scene is that district of Liverpool known as 'little hell'- the time midnight on Wednesday, December 3rd. never were more startling facts, bearing on the domestic life and manners of the dwellers of our 'Rookeries' and 'Slums' more broadly stated- never were the hideous features of vice and sin more vividly depicted- never was there such a lurid glare of light thrown upon the dark and foul stream of pollution which is stealthily flowing beneath the highways and byeways of modern civilisation…[25]

It was the courts and alleys, 'defiant of ventilation,' which Duncan had identified in1844 as factor in the spread of disease which were now seen as dangers to the whole town. In much the same way as Kay had warned Mancunians thirty years earlier, Shimmin warned Liverpudlians that slums were the nurseries of epidemics and the breeding ground of crime. The danger, like the presence of disease was now endemic in the courts and alleys of Liverpool. Shimmin informed his readers in 1863 that, 'a low enervating fever holds continual revel [in the] courts.'[26] Little wonder that attention became focused on controlling and regulating court development.

Finding solutions: regulating the town environment

How could the harmful courts and cellars be controlled? One simple expedient to control court and alleys was simply to prohibit their construction. However, the regulation of court building in 1846 led to a rush of speculative building to erect houses of the meanest sort to evade

the onset of legislative control. Attempts to demolish existing courts proceeded only piecemeal by using powers granted under Liverpool's Sanitary Act of 1864. Evicting the cellar population from illegal cellars in the 1840's brought its own problems. Duncan complained that the Irish simply reoccupied bricked up cellars (by 1850 there were 4,741 cellars recorded as 'illegally occupied') and given the limitations of housing provided by the free market, he was forced to limit cellar removals to 100 per month, with a time span of four years to complete the closure of the worst cellars, being well aware of the strains removal placed on existing housing stock. Commentators such as Shimmin worried that this expelled cellar population brought its own danger as the court population were morally debased by the displaced inhabitants from the cellars. As Shimmin pithily observed, the clearance of cellars was 'a removal but it was not a reformation.' Prohibition of court construction was finally done by 1864, but it still left a population, estimated at around one fifth of Liverpool's residents in the existing courts.

To a large degree the onus of the remedying the defective nature of the courts was placed on the inhabitants themselves. The morally degraded population of the courts clearly, in the eyes of observers, required education and visitation and legislation were the means to remedy this want. The Courts and Alleys sub-committee of Liverpool's Council summed up the problems thus, 'these places are very numerous and require constant attention on account of the habits of the people using them.' Duncan had been an early advocate of inspection and to cope with epidemics in 1848 had established, in his own words, 'a disciplined force of medical combatants.'

The structural defects of the privy accommodation were well defined by Samuel Holmes[27], a builder, in his evidence to the 1844 State of Large Towns Report (**document 6)**. The Council began exercising powers of inspecting courts under the Liverpool Sanitary Act of 1846 reinforced through a bye law of 1858. Where tenants shared privies they were expected to take weekly turns in 'thoroughly' cleaning the 'internal walls, floors, seats and fittings of each privy.' Tenants would be notified by inspectors of when their turn was. Shimmin, clearly impressed by such visitation records how in Maguire Street when 'one dame' refused to take her turn at cleaning, an official of Court and Alley sub-committee through 'firm and kindly' words persuades the woman to take her turn.[28] This idea of visitation caught the spirit of the age and mirrored visitation carried on by religious agencies- a practical face-to-face paternalistic solution to problems of urban living. Shimmin felt that the duty of the sub-committee under Newlands,

> Onerous and repulsive as it must frequently be, we have very good reason to know, [is] very faithfully discharged, and the visits of the Councillors in the courts in the densely populated areas have been attended with the most excellent results.[29]

Reality proved slightly more problematic. Officials noted that inhabitants refused to clean privies on the grounds that front street inhabitants used them. Perhaps slightly more worrying was the excuse of some *refuseniks* that they would not clean the privies on the grounds that they never used them.[30] Slum-dwellers, to outside observers, were pitifully equipped to tackle the filth. The sight of a woman attempting to clean the communal privy after the weekend 'spree' armed only with a diminutive birch broom and a small tin kettle of water seemed to speak of moral inadequacy and lack of education rather than simply material want. Debate in the Courts and Alleys sub-committee reveals that its members were less than pleased about a suggestion that all the individuals of the Health Committee of the Council be allocated specific courts and alleys to visit regularly. But the theme of visiting the slums, if not attractive to all Council members, retained its fascination for those driven by the voluntary impulse. Over the latter part of the nineteenth century there were renewed calls for extending visitation as part of a philanthropic sanitary visitation. Shimmin appealed for one in the 1860's, the head of the Scripture Readers' Association called for one two decades later and indeed the Town Clerk managed to run a scheme around Dale Street with the ominously sounding title of the 'sanitary vigilance committee.' However, its overly ambitious aims of attempting a complete reformation of the manners of the slum population ensured its swift demise.

Blame could easily be allocated to individuals rather than facing structural problems of inequality and low wages. Shimmin, who criticised the physical defects of courts, lay some of the blame on bad tenants and bad landlords in an attempt to explain the insanitary housing question as **Document 7** reveals. The debate about whether tenants should be legally responsible for the condition of their dwellings rumbled on and as document 11 reveals was the basis of many self help lectures in the city. The Council remained rather self-satisfied with its record of supervision.[31] Newlands, the Borough Surveyor, proudly recorded the prosecutions in the first two and a half years of operation. In truth it was much harder to cleanse the Augean stable. The initial staff of two inspectors had to be swiftly increased within three years by giving each inspector an assistant. Even so, the prosecution of offenders meant that inspectors spent time in the law courts giving evidence rather than the other type of court where their duties lay. Even then, when successful prosecutions they yielded little

in terms of punishment. A quick glance at the many cases reveals that magistrates pondered whether landlord or tenant was culpable. Where magistrates recognised that legally the tenants were responsible, many offenders were discharged on grounds of poverty. In 1885, despite nearly 14,000 courts being dirty there were only 15 fines with no prosecutions recorded in the following year. In any case, courts clean by morning could be dirty by mid-day. One side effect of this supervision was the completion of the numbering of houses and courts, whilst pressure by groups such as the clergy, ensured that courts were lit by gas. The courts were to be whitewashed once a year, increased to twice yearly from 1901. The Inspector of Nuisances together with a helper would take a handcart armed for a daily regime to counter fever consisting of sulphur to fumigate houses and carbolic acid to be sprinkled on the floors of infected dwellings.

The contents of the middens (for excreta), together with the contents of ash pits (for domestic waste, principally cinders, which themselves could be used to cover the contents of dry privies, but food waste was often present in the ash pits) would be collected by scavengers or nightsoilmen. The nightsoil was then taken in the early morning to the Leeds-Liverpool canal for manuring farmland in West Lancashire. The councillor for the Vauxhall Ward, Michael Whitty, complained vociferously in Council meetings about the injustice of the loading of the town's nightsoil from the Philip's Street wharf simply because this was the poorest district in town, but to no avail.

Nightsoil removal entailed further cleansing. The surface of courts would often be strewn with waste, and in the early years of court building any drain, if it existed at all, was simply an open gulley. If there was no drain, then effluvia simply flooded the surface of the court.[32] In addition, the nightmen, being unable to get their carts through the narrow court access, often piled the contents of the earth closets on the front streets for collection, which together with animal dung on the streets, rendered sweeping and later, washing a necessity. The gradual introduction of flagged paving to replace the rounded boulder paving meant that surfaces could at least be properly cleaned. Prior to 1862 the washing of courts had been performed by private contractors, but as their contract only obliged them to wash areas that were within thirty yards of a hydrant around half the courts remained dirty and the Council took over the task of washing itself. The council swept streets according 'to the class of people who lived there.' But at least such resources were allocated by need. By the 1880's the respectable streets were cleansed once a week, whilst the more problematic areas were swept daily.

The Council set to washing the courts with vigour, but their efforts at first were somewhat hampered by the restricted supply of Liverpool's water. Working to a strict rota two Council workmen were to follow the nightmen as they emptied the middens, hosing down the courts and then flushing the drains (they were allowed half an hour's water supply for each court) as they went. The nightmen had finished their duties by seven o'clock in the morning, and the Council workers who began work at four in the morning were hard pressed to finish for their first break of the day at nine o'clock. Ashpits containing household cinders were emptied in the early afternoon. This early start to the cleaner's working day was rendered necessary by the smell which permeated the neighbourhood when the sewer traps were opened. As a concession to the taxing nature of the task an eight hour day was standard for court cleaners

Problems solved or problems deferred? Environmental improvements 1860-1900

In 1851 the *Liverpool Mercury* proudly boasted that Liverpool Council had shown an interest in the social condition of its people, 'such as was never before exhibited by a public authority.'[33] Similarly, at the Bradford meeting of the National Association in 1860 representatives from Liverpool[34] gave glowing accounts of the progress made between 1847 and 1859. Not only had the death rate been lowered from 39 to 27 per thousand but, in common with many public health reformers, the ensuing financial benefits were touted. The savings yielded by public health investment between1847 and1859 were calculated by Council officials to be worth £12.5 million and pushed the poor rates down from 3s. in the pound to 1s. 9d., and their civic efforts, it was proclaimed, were in advance of Manchester, Glasgow and London. Newlands summed up these advances in a publication of 1859 (**document 8**)**.** Given the subsequent rise in the death rate in the 1860's, and persistent infant mortality, these boasts were revealed to be somewhat premature, and Hugh Shimmin's crusade for further legislation in the 1860's was a call to action. The courts were being replaced piecemeal but Liverpool's sanitary reformers had another ambitious goal.

From 1863 onward, Liverpool began switching from earth closets to water closets. Although historians have been unkind to Dr. Duncan's more timid successor, Dr Trench, he led the campaign for the conversion of privies to water closets. Discussion of this was by no means new; Newlands had advocated closets as early as 1848. Not unexpectedly, landlords mounted a rear guard campaign against change. An investigation

of a tunnel midden[35] in Holland-Terrace, Brunswick Street in 1866, which ran for 30 yards and had not been cleansed for five years, found that the tenants had been pressurised into petitioning for its retention by the landlord on pain of eviction. When the trap of this midden was opened, it was reported, (with that, almost unnecessary, olfactory observation beloved of Victorian sanitary investigators) 'the smell was very bad.'[36] But smell was very much part of the Victorian understanding making connections between the environment and disease. Trench clearly felt that the main reason for a water-borne sewage system was so that tenants were not, as he so cogently put it, 'exposed to the impure canals of pestiferous sewage.' To observers such as Trench, the very air of the courts of Liverpool appeared literally charged with the agency of disease, the miasma.

The water closet system advocated by the Council for the Liverpool courts was the trough closet felt to be cheap (the cost was £10 for the pair of privies) and 'practical' for 'slum' populations, a coded reference for durability against tenant negligence. This system was a stoneware trough linked to the individually-partitioned pair of closets. A slight incline allowed the shallow reservoir of liquid to spill into a trap at one end of the closet (the trap being protected by bars to prevent the feckless slum population disposing of non-organic matter into the sewers) with a cistern at the other end, five or six feet above, flushing the trough. The frequency of flushing the troughs was to be dictated by reasons of water economy rather than that of the tenants' convenience. As Newlands makes clear 'the habits of the users' made it imperative that 'the control of them [closets]: should not be left to persons using them but they should be managed by servants of the Corporation'. Thus stop taps ensured that the automatic flushing occurred usually only once a day (this of course meant that waste matter was free to linger at the bottom of the troughs) but the Medical Officer of Health generously conceded that in cases of fever, affected courts were to have their troughs flushed twice daily. A water closet system and an effective regime of street cleaning both required a plentiful supply of water. The Rivington water scheme, from the early 1860's onward provided an inadequate supply and the water itself was often an unappealing muddy colour. When, for example there was insufficient water in 1864, workers on flushing duties had to manually clear out the sewers. The following year water was only supplied for two hours a day and for much of the period between 1864 and 1867 the supply was only eight hours per day. This produced problems for the poorer consumers because, unlike the affluent ratepayers who had cisterns to store the water, they had few storage utensils and the water supply was often switched on

at inconvenient times. It was only with the opening of the Vyrnwy reservoir in 1892 that Liverpool's supply was effectually secured[37]. A water-borne sewage system was still in advance of some of Lancashire towns- Preston was using ash closets until 1914.

Yet ratepayers remained dissatisfied that their investments had not yielded lower death rates during the 1860's. There was continuing controversy over the merits of a water closet system and in 1871 the Council asked two experts, Dr Parkes, Professor of Hygiene at the Royal Medical School Netley, and Dr Sanderson from University College London, to investigate. Ill-feeling began even before the investigation began. Councillor Bennett sparked off a Council inquiry when he accused pro-closet supporters of opening the sewers to ensure their cleanliness in advance of any formal inspection

The **Report by Parkes and Sanderson (document 9)** vindicated Liverpool's sewerage system together with its potentially troublesome drains which were inspected and found to be clear. However it was the denizens of the slums not the drains which shocked the two investigators and, much like Duncan almost thirty years earlier, their findings mixed public health with morality. As the extract shows, they could scarcely conceal their mixture of disgust and repulsion at, for example the standard practice of the Liverpool slum dwellers use of the privies by standing on the seats allegedly from a fear of venereal disease.[38] Parkes and Sanderson do not feel it necessary to note that all privies were often in a disgusting state and, of course, unlit at night. Were the slum dwellers normal they queried or part of some residuum? So shocked were they by their contact with the northern slums of Liverpool that they wondered whether even 20% of labourers in the six slum streets they observed led 'decent lives of ordinary restraint.' Irish Catholics came in for special castigation due to their practice of early marriage, one inculcated by Catholic priests, in contrast to the 'concubinage of their neighbours. '

The Council accepted the Report in a mood of self congratulation but in truth there was something for everyone in the Report. The House and Landowners' Association, ever eager to promote individualistic explanations, used Parkes and Sanderson's view that 'drink and immorality' were causes of 'insanitary filth'[39] rather than rapacious landlords, and, in later decades made use of the Report's suggestion that municipal housing was simply a boon to pauperism, Critics of the Council could also point to the Report's suggestion that more needed to be done. Parkes and Sanderson to a large degree simply restated obvious truths. Using six of the worst streets, the Report found that a wide discrepancy existed between the wealthier areas such as Rodney Street and the

insalubrious areas such as Lace Street. And this was perhaps the point. For all the expenditure on sewers and health measures little in terms of improvement in the mortality rate and inequalities in health could be seen. The same areas of need in 1844 were the same areas of need in 1871.

Demolition of the courts proved painfully slow. Liverpool's Sanitary Act of 1864 allowed for a Grand Jury to make a Presentment against insanitary dwellings allowing for their demolition. Gaps were opened up to allow air into other insanitary properties, but, despite Liverpool's pride in its local Act[40], it was a cumbersome and unwieldy mechanism. Dr Trench insisted on trying to make alterations to court houses as an alternative to demolition, a policy which perhaps proved cheaper only in the short term. Thus by the close of the nineteenth century, the city had lost much, but by no means all, of its court housing.

In the 1880's there was a renewed interest in slum dwellings when the *Liverpool Daily Post* ran a series of articles by an anonymous 'special commissioners,' (comprising of a city councillor, a local physician and a journalist). This was published in pamphlet form in 1883 as **Squalid Liverpool (document 10)**. This journalistic investigation was probably inspired by Andrew Mearn's *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, but Liverpool was also in the grip of 'fever' and the newspaper's discussions were mirrored by Liverpool Council's concerns over the resurgence of typhus and smallpox and arguably by wider concerns over economic depression and its effects on the discipline of the lower orders.[41] The solutions suggested were not novel and simply echoed earlier reports by advocating more ventilation. Perhaps some of its most interesting points are the asides it makes. The whole study says much about the relaxed and candid attitude of the slum inhabitants to the procession of inquisitive visitors to their neighbourhood. Another interesting aside was the heroic response of Catholic clergy, itself a reminder of the 'martyred' priests of Liverpool's cholera epidemic of 1848.[42]

The influence of this publication was somewhat diffuse. 'Squalid Liverpool' did for a while become a local catch phrase for the condition of the people. Its timing coincided with attempts Liverpool's 'Tory democracy' movement to make further ventures into municipal housing and this explains the pointed references to 'compensation' for landowners within *Squalid Liverpool.* The pamphlet provoked a rash of lectures at local churches and the YMCA together with letters to the press largely claiming that the poverty of 'Squalid Liverpool' owed its existence to the drink trade. The respectable piano manufacturer and retailer, Crane and Sons of Scotland Road (also prominent advertisers in the *Liverpool Daily Post*) wrote a strongly-worded protest about *Squalid Liverpool's* stigmatisation

of the district, which also serves as a reminder that the main streets of even the poorer areas were populated by the middle class. Perhaps the definition of 'slumland' was not so clear after all.[43] Nor was this the last time the *Liverpool Daily Post* was to investigate Liverpool's court dwellings warning its readers in 1906.that its findings 'were not for the squeamish.'.

What was the way out of the slums? Houses constructed with a rental value of under £12 show a marked decline after 1846, and a sharp decline after 1852 which correlated to stricter bye-laws which ensured better housing standards. The free market's limited ability to providing decent working class housing could not thrive in the face of legislative intervention. One alternative solution which appealed to middle class commentators was a self help one. Put simply, if tenants saved money instead of wasting it on drink, they could afford the higher rents commanded by better quality housing. This was common currency amongst Liverpool's reformers. The Unitarian and 'Christian merchant', George Melly, for example, in a lecture to the working classes on self help informed his listeners that 'every shilling taken from the gin-shop is a shilling spent on better housing' and commented that it was the tenants' duty to show capitalists that a demand existed for better housing and only then could the demand for decent working class housing be met.[44] This view is forcefully outlined by **Hugh Stowell Brown (document 11).**[45] This popular Baptist preacher delivered a mix of secular and moral messages to crowded audiences at his Sunday afternoon lectures at the Concert Hall in Nelson Street. According to the local press, by 1857 these lectures could attract audiences of nearly 4000, although Caine's local religious census in 1853 gave lower figures of just under 1400. Caine's figures did indicate that all but a handful of the audience were from the working classes. Other sources suggest a predominantly superior working class constituency, with the audience whist 'unmistakably working class' were all 'respectably dressed.'[46] The attraction was very much the personality of Brown himself as he entertained his audiences with everyday subjects delivered in catchy rhetorical style employing mimickery to engage the listeners. Alternately shocked by the living conditions over which the poor had no control and the filth they generated, Stowell Brown epitomises the Victorian ambiguity about whether the pig created the sty or the sty created the pig. Stowell Brown's lecture was delivered in 1858, yet only a few years later Liverpool's Corporation were themselves beginning to seek to stimulate the free market into the construction of better quality working class dwellings.