

CARING FOR RECORDS?

Records of health care on Merseyside as untapped resources for the historian

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The aim of this paper is to draw attention to record sources for the history of health care on Merseyside; some of those sources are to be found locally, some elsewhere; not all such records have been deposited in record repositories or even been listed. It is suggested that these records present relatively untapped resources for the social historian of medicine.

Listing of the administrative records of Liverpool Royal Infirmary in 1974 revealed classes of records which one does not often find in hospitals: not only were there minute books and annual reports (1784 onwards) but also registers of donations and of medical staff, property deeds, plans, photographs, and press cuttings. The survey of hospital archives (and artefacts) in the Mersey Regional Health Authority (RHA)'s area (Merseyside and North Cheshire), undertaken in 1981-82 with Manpower Service Commission (MSC)-funded staff based in the University Archives, Liverpool, has resulted in a large quantity of such archives being deposited in the appropriate local authority record offices (e.g. records of Liverpool hospitals with Liverpool Record Office, in the Central Libraries, William Brown Street).¹ Administrative records found in the survey included both minute books and patient registers. Case notes were seldom found to predate 1948 (the inception of the National Health Service (NHS)) with the principal exception of Leasowe Hospital (case notes 1923-71), Liverpool Royal Infirmary (case notes 1900 onwards) and the older established psychiatric hospitals;² a large proportion of these case notes have been deposited, the Rainhill records (at present mainly up to 1920) in Merseyside Record Office (4th floor, Cunard Building, Liverpool). Records were occasionally found which had survived several moves; for instance, Liverpool Maternity Hospital (present building erected 1924-6) was found to possess records from 1826 onwards, including annual reports (1869 onwards), minute books (1868 onwards), and reports of meetings of the accoucheurs (1826-69). Together with the copies of annual reports (1883-1921) of the Ladies Charity and Lying-in Hospital, Liverpool (later the Liverpool Maternity Hospital) and other records relating to Practical Midwifery courses held by the Revd.

Professor J.M. Beazley (University Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Royal Liverpool Hospital), these records present important materials for research.

Hitherto, use of hospital archives in the region has been limited to studies of a few individual former voluntary hospitals; broader studies (perhaps comparative) are awaited, to follow Dr. Millicent Regan's study of psychiatric care in Liverpool and SW Lancashire 1650-1948 (*A Caring Society*, St. Helens and Knowsley Health Authority, 1986). Readers of *Social History of Medicine* (the journal of the Society for the Social History of Medicine) will be aware of the volume of research being undertaken elsewhere and of recent publications which might provide models³ as well as broader contextual frameworks in which to place regional developments.⁴

Few higher degree theses on aspects of health care in this region predate the mid-1970s, exceptions including studies of the nutrition of Liverpool schoolboys and of the provision for welfare of women and young workers in industry (MA theses, Liverpool, dating from 1937 and 1949 respectively). At Liverpool University, the Departments of Geography and History have particularly fostered such work; to the MA in the History of Social Policies (with dissertations based on archival research) may most recently be added the MSc course in the History of Science and Technology.

There is a danger of over-concentration on the hospital (particularly the voluntary hospital) sector, which may be corrected by reference to other source material. In 1907 evidence was given to the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws that Mill Road Infirmary (run by the West Derby Board of Guardians) had more beds than all Liverpool's voluntary hospitals combined. Similarly, Liverpool Dispensary saw over 13,000 patients annually before the close of the 18th century, far more than Liverpool Infirmary (then the sole voluntary hospital in Liverpool) was treating. If health care is regarded as a pyramid, then treatment in hospital may be seen as the narrow peak with primary care as the broad base; the bulk of the pyramid is represented by the records of public health departments (prior to the 1974 health service reorganization) and of primary care.⁵

Surviving records of local authority public health departments in the region mainly comprise

records of their predecessor bodies (local boards of health and boards of guardians) dating back mainly to the early 1840s, the minutes of the Health Committees (and their sub-committees) and reports (particularly annual reports) of the Medical Officers of Health (MoH) of each town from the late 1840s to 1974.⁶ Little correspondence of these public health departments survives locally, an exception being Letter Books of Liverpool's Medical Officers of Health, 1849-79. It is, therefore, fortunate that a large number of records of the Ministry of Health (established in 1919) and its predecessors survive and may be consulted at the Public Record Office's Kew branch. Here is correspondence of the Poor Law Commission with the local Poor Law Unions from the 1830s onwards and of the Ministry of Health with the local public health departments. Such records have not been much used except for studies of nineteenth century poor law (and public health) in some towns in the region; they modify somewhat the view obtained from a reading of the surviving records retained locally.

CONCLUSION

For the 1930s there are not only the chapters on health provisions in *The Social Survey of Merseyside* edited by D. Caradog Jones (Liverpool University Press, Vol. 3, 1934) but also the unpublished surveys of public health provisions made throughout the country by Ministry of Health staff in the early 1930s and to which the Ministry's Chief Medical Officer makes brief reference in his annual reports. The Liverpool section of this Ministry survey alone comprises seven files.⁷ Each of the general Survey Reports presents information under a number of headings common to all the reports, commencing with the economic context. "Apparent efficiency regardless of cost" is an apt description of the public health service,' wrote a Ministry official in the report on Liverpool (1933) which commented adversely on jobbery in the council, avoidance of criticism, and a general reluctance to change but praised some of the individual services run by the local authority (e.g. Alder Hey Hospital: 'one of the best designed, best fitted and ... best run in the country'). These Ministry surveys emphasise the uneven provision of health services before the NHS; one might compare the Liverpool report with that for St. Helens where, for instance, unlike in Liverpool there was no evidence that hospital facilities were lacking.⁸

There are a number of individual files of correspondence between the Ministry and local authorities on public health and related issues - eleven alone for Liverpool covering the period 1919-28 - which range from one on the Carnegie Model Centre for promoting the welfare of

mothers and infants (with a report on a visit in 1927)⁹ to one on the abortive efforts of Professor E.W. Hope (MoH of Liverpool, 1894-1924) to introduce a system of compulsory treatment of those suffering from venereal disease.¹⁰ A somewhat different view is gained from reading the minutes (and reports) of the Health Committee and its subcommittees and Professor Hope's *Health at the Gateway: Problems and International Obligations of a Seaport City* (1931). In some cases the picture may be filled in by other surviving papers such as copies of circulars of the National Union of Women Workers and other bodies regarding the VD campaign.¹¹

The significance of the contribution of charities to health care (locally as well as nationally) is insufficiently recognised and their records barely used, certainly for tracing twentieth century developments. For Liverpool there is the pioneer work of Margaret Simey, *Charitable Effort in Liverpool in the 19th century* (1951) and, most recently, Lawrence Feehan's Liverpool Ph.D thesis (1988) on 'Charitable Effort, Statutory Authorities and the Poor in Liverpool c. 1850-1914'. The pattern varies from place to place; Liverpool had an unusually large number of charities, many of which were 'subsidised' by the Council in the 1930s.

Records of local charities are found in a variety of locations. Annual reports of the Liverpool Dispensaries may be found in the library of Liverpool Medical Institution (1842-1951, incomplete), Merseyside Record Office (1905-51, incomplete) and Liverpool University Archives (1803 and 1807-11; microfilm of reports for 1825 and 1848 held by the British Library).¹² Merseyside Record Office holds records of a number of major charities (Liverpool Child Welfare Association, 1870-1961; Liverpool Personal Service Society, 1917-77; etc.) and also a series of annual reports and accounts of over 270 Merseyside charities, received from the Charity Commission. These latter reports and accounts cover voluntary hospitals, district nursing associations, orphanages, homes of rest, convalescent funds, etc. They include such charities as the Liverpool Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children,¹³ the Mothers' Rest Association,¹⁴ the Liverpool Home for Incurables¹⁵ and the Liverpool Foot Hospital.¹⁶ The adverse economic climate of the 1930s seriously affected not only the voluntary hospitals but also, as these reports reveal, a number of other charities, despite their connections with local authorities and their fund-raising activities (including

charging fees to those of their patients able to afford to pay).

The Liverpool office of the Charity Commission (at Graeme House, Derby Square) holds not only a series of Central Register (CR) files (of copies of more recent accounts of local charities) but also a series of Charitable Trust (CT) files; CR files may be inspected as may also those CT files which are over 30 years old. Consulting these files, for instance, for the Liverpool Foot Hospital we find that by 1960 Liverpool Corporation was bearing the entire cost of running the hospital. The CR file for the Walter Harding Treats Trust (established in 1937) provides an example of a change in emphasis of a charity's work over time: it reveals that until the early 1970s the Trust's income was devoted to paying for theatre parties, Llandudno steamer outings, a hospital's tennis tournament and newspapers for hospital nursing staff in Liverpool and Wirral, whilst more recently the Trust's income was accumulated to allow over £13,000 in 1985 to be paid for furnishing carpets for nurses' accommodation.

A number of older-established charities have retained their non-current records. They include the Royal School for the Blind, Liverpool, (founded in 1791),¹⁷ the Royal Liver Friendly Society (founded in 1850), the Merseyside Health Benefits Council (established in 1871 as the Liverpool Hospital Saturday and Sunday Funds)¹⁸ and the N.W. Cancer Research Fund (the successor to the Friends of the Liverpool Radium Institute, which was opened in 1927). In many such cases there are also records of bodies in the same field to provide comparative and contextual material, such as the records of the Liverpool Workshops for the Blind (established in 1860) and the Ministry of Health's unpublished surveys of welfare for the blind made in the 1930s. In the case of cancer research, there are other cancer-related records in Liverpool Record Office and amongst the Medical School's archives in the University Archives. The University Archives holds the non-current records of the Medical School (minutes, reports, correspondence), deposited papers of former staff and students of the School (notes taken at lectures, recollections, etc.) and records of several societies with close connections with the School such as the Medical Students' Debating Society (established in 1874, now the Medical Students' Society) and the Liverpool Society of Anaesthetists (minutes 1930-63). Dr. June Jones used records of both the School and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine in writing her Ph.D thesis,¹⁹ but clearly there is scope for studies of the post-1925 period, perhaps by comparison with developments at the Manchester Medical

School. Professor Cecil Gray has recently deposited with the University Archives tape-recordings of his interviews with Professor Sir Norman Jeffcoate, the late Professor Charles Wells, and the late Mr. Norman ('Nobby') Roberts. A working party (of which I am a member), which at present is working on a volume of essays on various aspects of the history of nursing on Merseyside, hopes shortly to undertake an oral history programme in furtherance of its work. There have also been proposals for recording the recollections of those connected with the development of orthopaedic surgery in Merseyside and North Wales. There is scope too for an oral history of general practice in the region; this would be especially valuable, given the low survival rate of records of primary care.

The range of documentary sources which may assist the historian of health care is very wide and one comes across records created for totally different purposes which shed light on the subject. Professor Norman McCord has shown how the returns of the clergy in the Diocese of Durham to successive visitations by the diocesan bishop from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s throw light on social, economic and moral conditions in parishes, as perceived by the clergy.²⁰ Would the Liverpool (Anglican) diocesan visitation records, which, for the post-2nd World War period are held by Liverpool Record Office, throw similar light and would the parish records held centrally by the Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool also be worth consulting? These I have not yet looked at.

Eventually, I hope to produce and publish a guide to record sources for the history of health care on Merseyside; in the meantime I would welcome knowledge of any such records which are not already deposited in a record office. Good record care is desirable in the interests not only of patients (and their case notes) but also of researchers, be they epidemiologists, public health specialists, sociologists or historians. We all have a rôle to play in ensuring that records of long-term value are identified, preserved, and made available for research.

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Notes and References

1. For further details see Adrian Allan, 'Underneath the Archives', *Health and Social Services Journal*, Vol. XCII, No. 4793, 22 April 1982, pp. 496-9; reference copies of the individual surveys may be consulted in the University Archives (Harold Cohen Library, Liverpool).
2. Rainhill Hospital: registers and notes 1851 onwards; Countess of Chester Hospital: patient registers, case-books, etc., 1840 onwards.
3. e.g. John V. Pickstone, *Medicine and Industrial Society: a history of hospital development in Manchester and its region, 1752-1946* (Manchester, 1985).
4. e.g. Charles Webster's first volume of his official history of the NHS, *The Health Services since the War, Vol. I, Problems of Health Care: The National Health Service before 1957* (HMSO, 1988) and John V. Pickstone, 'Medicine in Industrial Britain: the uses of local studies', *Social History of Medicine*, Vol. 2 No. 2 (1989), pp. 197-203.
5. See, in particular, Margaret Pelling, 'Model records - users and uses' in David Reeder (ed.), *Archives and the Historian* (Working Papers No. 2, Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester, 1989).
6. The Merseyside Archives Liaison Group is in 1991 to publish a guide to public health holdings in Merseyside's record offices.
7. PRO Kew, MH66/721-727.
8. Survey Report for St. Helens: PRO Kew, MH66/856.
9. PRO Kew, MH52/311.
10. PRO Kew, MH52/316B.
11. Liverpool Record Office, Accession 977.

12. Mrs Joy Campbell is currently completing a Liverpool Ph.D thesis on the Liverpool Dispensary 1778-1850, but as yet no one has made a study of its later history.
13. Founded in 1883, with an almost complete set of annual reports 1908-41, providing statistics, social comment, specimen cases, etc.
14. Established in 1920 by the Liverpool Personal Service Society.
15. Established in c. 1869. Its annual reports include medical reports and references to the work of honorary staff such as (Sir) Robert Jones, the orthopaedic surgeon.
16. Established in 1929 to serve the poor and registering almost 25,000 attendances annually by the late 1930s.
17. This has a fine series of annual reports, minutes (giving details of patients on their admission and discharge), accounts, case books, etc. These have as yet been barely exploited by historians.
18. Special Collections Department, Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool, holds minutes etc. of the Merseyside Hospitals Council (formerly the Liverpool Hospital Saturday and Sunday Funds) for c. 1927-56, ref. MS18.1-25.
19. J. Jones, 'Science, Utility and the 'Second City of the Empire' : The Sciences and especially the Medical Sciences at Liverpool University, 1881-1925' (unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Manchester, 1989).
20. Norman McCord, *The days of Visitation: an examination of some Durham records 1857-1936* (Durham Cathedral Lecture, published by Dean and Chapter of Durham, 1987).

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