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They boast extensive documentation from across the globe, providing invaluable source material for students, educators, and researchers working within a range of scholarly disciplines, including history, politics, sociology, and international relations. Our fascinating digital holdings offer insights into global historical events and trends, typically through a British lens. They serve to broaden our understanding of history, and help us to make sense of contemporary social, cultural, economic, and political landscapes.

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Liverpool Shipping Records: Imports and Exports, 1820–1900, falls under the broad themes of “Colonialism and Empire” and “Economics”. You can explore related collections, such as *Bristol Shipping Records: Imports and Exports, 1770–1917*, and *British Mercantile Trade Statistics, 1662–1809*, by scanning the QR code.



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info@britishonlinearchives.com



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Liverpool Shipping Records: Imports and Exports, 1820–1900

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Liverpool Shipping Records: Imports and Exports, 1820–1900, documents 80 years of merchant shipping to and from the city of Liverpool. This collection comprises Bills of Entry derived from the reports and manifests of ships that docked in the city. These detailed sources offer unique insights into Liverpool’s maritime history and the goods traded in the city throughout most of the nineteenth century.

The prosperity of the city during this period was built on its success as one of Britain’s major docks. In the early eighteenth century, Liverpool merchants supplemented their existing trade links with Ireland and Europe with voyages around the Atlantic.

Liverpool became heavily involved in various imperial trade networks, including those concerned with cotton, indigo, rice, rum, sugar, and tobacco. Many of the goods traded in the city were derived from the labour of enslaved people—Liverpool and its merchants were major players in the transatlantic slave trade. By 1800, the city was the largest slave trading port in the world and much of Liverpool’s wealth and development relied upon enslavement and this triangular trade.

This fascinating collection provides students, educators, and researchers with a comprehensive survey of how Liverpool, and the wider economy of the United Kingdom, interacted with and influenced global trade networks.



“During the eighteenth century, the wealthy city corporation poured millions of pounds into constructing wet docks that became the envy of other British ports. Liverpool rose to prominence demographically and commercially in this period.”

Professor Kenneth Morgan, Brunel University.



Bills of Entry are records of imports and exports. The first Bills for Liverpool were printed around 1750. Over time, they became more extensive, eventually serving as business newspapers for the local commercial community. By the late 1840s, the Bills were printed daily, except for Sundays, supplying a record of maritime trade in Liverpool.



The sources in this collection list ship names, origins, destinations, captains, tonnage, arrival and departure dates, cargo details, and the names of the individuals and companies involved with shipments.



The sources trace the flow of goods. Pimento and logwood were shipped to Britain from Jamaica, while spices came from India. Britain exported tobacco and paint to Africa, and wine and leather to Brazil.



In 1807, Britain passed the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Yet, merchants still traded goods made by enslaved people, and slavery’s legacy remained conspicuous in Liverpool’s trade networks.



The sources trace the rise of Liverpool firms like Sandbach, Tinne, & Co., who owned enslaved people, traded West Indian goods, and, from the 1830s, became major transporters of indentured labour.

Containing over 85,000 images, this collection provides an overview of the nature and development of Liverpool’s trade routes and relationships. The sources highlight how trading priorities changed over time, particularly during the Industrial Revolution, when Britain began exporting large volumes of goods manufactured using new processes and technologies. Crucially, this collection also illustrates how Britain’s commercial interests and networks laid the foundations for a vast, global empire.

Liverpool emerged as a major slave trading port in the eighteenth century, but this shifted after the 1807 abolition of the slave trade and the ending of plantation slavery in most British colonies after 1833. Cotton therefore became a key commodity in Liverpool, with the first North American cotton arriving in 1784. By 1850, over 1.5 million bales were imported annually, making up nearly half of the city’s trade. This boom depended on enslaved labour in North America, where slavery was not abolished until 1865. Lancashire mills processed the cotton, exporting finished goods worldwide from Liverpool’s docks.



Sources include: Liverpool Record Office, Liverpool Maritime Museum