Book review

Liverpool – a History of ‘The Great Port’

Dr Adrian Jarvis. Liverpool History Press, Wirral, UK, 2014, ISBN 978-0-9573833-1-9, £14.99, 274 pp.

This latest book from Dr Adrian Jarvis is his seventh in a long line of impeccably researched offerings, and analyses the social, economic and political impacts on the long history and development of the dock system at Liverpool, its people and the surrounding area. Covering the most crucial period of the Port of Liverpool, this book recounts and refreshes the fascinating story of its rise from insignificance to port infrastructure, which at its peak was unmatched anywhere in the world.

Yet again Dr Jarvis has achieved the perfect balance in preparing a book that is both of interest to academics as well as to the serious general reader. In 14 chapters, he updates the reader by way of a journey through the growth of the docks from 1672 to 1972. Highly readable, and at times reassuringly irreverent, it examines how the Port of Liverpool was run and how it and the city were interdependent on each other for growth. The book ends with an epilogue by Peter Lucas (former chief engineer of the dock company), which underlines the period and reflects on the continuing challenges and progress of change post 1972.

Throughout the 14 chapters there are references to many of the civil engineers the Institution of Civil Engineers now counts among its hall of fame. Some reputations are shown to be more deserving than others and there are some whose reputations were unfairly tarnished by political acts outside of their control. Dock engineers spent almost all of the capital raised

and managed dockyards consisting of thousands of employees. Their status was among the elite of the town and they were often consulted by others planning large engineering infrastructure endeavours, perhaps not necessarily for their technical knowhow, but maybe for their superior organisational skills.

Research sources are varied and throughout are referenced after each of the 14 chapters. They centre primarily on those archives of the port held by the Liverpool Maritime Museum. The book is particularly well illustrated, with over 170 images of which many are previously unseen figures from private collections.

Having read nearly all of this author's books (I might have missed one) he never ceases to amaze this reviewer with his easy-to-read style while maintaining an enviable balance between the academic and social reader's needs for detail and justification. As usual the book is impeccably researched and signposts areas of potential further research and understanding. This is a book that masterfully updates the history of the town and port, through refreshing previous assertions with recent research, while also moving forward the overall understanding of the evolution of 'the great port'. Great works previously published on the same subject are referred to, but where necessary some of their conclusions are challenged and amended by the results of more recent investigations.

This book is recommended without hesitation as a must-have for all professionals as well as social readers with any remote interest in Liverpool and its port.

Ian Weir